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ABSTRACT

A study investigating the learning strategies in oral communication used by Chinese students of English as a second language in China consisted of identification of the general strategies and specific techniques for improving oral proficiency, and assessment of the effects of some of them on achievement. It also explored some learner characteristics believed to affect learning strategies and techniques. Sixty graduating English major students at Guangzhou Foreign Languages Institute completed a strategies questionnaire and were given an oral test designed to evaluate their communicative abilities. The ten highest and nine lowest achievers in oral communication, as determined by the oral measure, were interviewed to obtain more information about the learners, especially their personal insights about their learning processes and strategies. The results yielded a large number of strategies and techniques characteristic of successful learning. Statistical analyses demonstrated that a certain number of them are critical for the improvement of oral proficiency. These findings confirmed several good learner strategies suggested by the Rubin-Stern-Naiman inventories. In addition, the interview findings revealed some idiosyncratic behavior patterns that seriously affected language learning and also demonstrated the complexity and individuality of the foreign language learning process. (MSE)

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AN INVESTIGATION OF LEARNING STRATEGIES IN ORAL COMMUNICATION THAT CHINESE EFL LEARNERS IN CHINA EMPLOY

A Thesis

Submitted to the Division of English

of the Graduate School

of the Chinese University of Hong Kong

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Philosophy

By

Huang Xiao-hua

August, 1984

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Abstract

This study investigates the learning strategies in oral communication employed by Chinese EFL students in China. It consists of identification of the general strategies and specific techniques for improving oral proficiency, and assessment of the effects of some of them on achievement. It also explores some learner characteristics which are believed to affect learning strategies and techniques.

Sixty graduating English major students at Guangzhou Foreign Languages Institute did a strategies questionnaire. They were also given an oral test designed to evaluate their oral communicative abilities. In order to obtain more in-depth information about the learners, especially their personal insights about their learning processes and strategies, the questionnaire was supplemented by interviews with the ten highest and nine lowest achievers in oral communication as defined by the criterion measure.

The results of the investigation yielded a large number of strategies and techniques characteristic of successful learning. The statistical analyses demonstrated that a certain number of strategies and techniques are critical for the improvement of oral proficiency. These findings confirmed several good learner strategies which the Rubin-Stern-Naiman inventories had suggested.

Furthermore, the interview findings revealed a certain number of idiosyncratic patterns of behaviour which seriously affected language learning. They also demonstrated the complexity and individuality of foreign language learning process.

CONTENTS

Chapter 1. Introduction 1

Chapter 2. Literature Review 6
2.1. Strategies and Techniques 6
2.1.1. Rubin-Stern Inventories 8
2.1.2. Major Approaches to Strategy Research 16
2.1.2.1. Identification of Strategies and Techniques ... 16
2.1.2.2. Assessment of the Roles of Strategies 23
2.1.2.3. Diary Studies 26
2.2. Affective Factors 28
2.2.1. Attitudes and Motivation 29
2.3. Summary 35
Notes 36

Chapter 3. Description of Subjects, Instruments and Procedures 37
3.1. Subjects 37
3.2. Instruments 40
3.2.1. Questionnaire 40
3.2.2. Interview Schedule 44
3.2.3. Criterion Measure 45
3.3. Procedures 49
Notes 53

Chapter 4. Results 55
4.1. Results of Questionnaire Part I 55
4.2. Results of Questionnaire Part III 60
4.3. Scoring and Results of the Criterion Mearsure 64
4.4. Scoring and Results of Questionnaire Part II 65
4.4.1. Use of Strategies and Techniques 65
4.4.2. Comparison of Group Differences 68
4.4.3. Effects on Achievement 70
4.5. Results of Interview 74
4.5.1. Personal Interest and Preference for Modality in Language Learning 74
4.5.2. Attitude and Motivation 77
4.5.3. Conscious vs. Unconscious Learning 78
4.5.4. Memorization 79
4.5.5. Dependence/Independence in EFL Learning 82
4.5.6. The Role of Learning Strategies and Techniques 84
Notes 86

Chapter 5. Discussion and Interpretation 87
5.1. Discussion of the Results in Questionnaire Parts I & III 87
5.1.1. Learning Techniques Idenified from Questionnaires .. 87
5.1.2. Major Differences between Successful and Unsuccessful Students 90
5.1.3. Techniques Characteristic of the Foreign Language Setting 92
5.2. Discussion of Statistical Findings in Questionnaire Part II 94
5.2.1. Learning Strategies and Techniques 94

5.2.2. Practice in Speaking, Listening and Reading 99
5.3. Discussion of Interview Findings 102
5.3.1. Learning Techniques Identified from Interviews 103
5.3.2. Personal Interest and Motivational Factors 103
5.3.3. Memorization in FL Learning in China 105
5.4. Strategies and Techniques of Successful Learners 107
5.5. Discussion of Research Instruments 112
5.5.1. Strategies Questionnaire 113
5.5.2. Interview 116
Notes 118

Chapter 6. Case Studies of Selected Students 119
6.1. Case Study One 119
6.2. Case Study Two 123
6.3. Case Study Three 125
6.4. Case Study Four 128
6.5. Discussion of Case Studies 131

Chapter 7. Conclusions 133
7.1. Major Findings 133
7.1.1. Findings Regarding Strategies and Learner Factors 133
7.1.2. Findings Regarding Research Methodology 135
7.2. Suggestions for Further Research 136
7.3. Some Practical Implications 138
7.3.1. Understanding More about Learners 138
7.3.2. How Can Teachers Help Learners 139

Appendix I Strategies Questionnaire 142
Appendix II Interview Schedule 147
Appendix III Table 15. Simple Regression: Effects of Each Individual Variable on the Oral Test 149
Table 16. Intercorrelations of All Variables Examined in Questionnaire Part II 150

Bibliography 152

Figures

1. Stern's Model for Examination of Second Language Learning ... 7
2. Bialystok's Model for Language Learning Investigation 24
3. Gardner's Model of Motivational Characteristics 32

Tables

1. Results of Questionnaire Part I 57
2. Results of Questionnaire Part III 62
3. t-Test: Comparison of Group Means in the Oral Test 65
4. Means and Standard Deviations of the Strategies 65
5. Means and Standard Deviations of Sub-Categories of Formal and Functional Oral Practice 67
6. Means and Standard Deviations of Practice in Listening, Speaking and Reading 67
7. t-Test: Comparison of Group Means in Use of Strategies and Techniques 69
8. t-Test: Goup Difference in Practice in Listening, Speaking and Reading 70
9. Multiple Regression I: Learning Strategies 72
10. Multiple Regression II: Learning Techniques Characteristic of Formal Oral Practice 73
11. Multiple Regression III: Learning Techniques Characteristic of Functional Oral Practice 73
12. Multiple Regression IV: Practice in Speaking, Listening and Reading 74
13. Personal Interest or Preference in EFL Learning 75
14. Dependence/Independence in EFL Learning 83

(Appendix III)
15. Simple Regression: Effects of Each Individual Variable on the Oral Test 149
16. Intercorrelations of All Variables Examined in Questionnaire Part II 150

Chapter 1

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the study of second language learning process. Research and investigations have been conducted with attempts to establish what constitutes a successful language learner and to identify what learning strategies and techniques the successful language learner employs (Rubin,1975; Stern,1975; Naiman et al.,1978; Bialystok and Frohlich,1977, 1978; Bialystok,1979; Wesche,1979; Reiss,1981;etc.).

These studies have provided thought-provoking information about successful and unsuccessful learning. They have also suggested inventories of learning strategies of good language learners based on the results of classroom observation,questionnaires, interviews with learners and teachers, and tests of important factors relating to language learning.

China has probably the largest population of EFL learners in the world. While more and more emphasis has been put on the improvement of the quality of EFL teaching and learning, very little is known about the learning process and strategies of Chinese EFL learners. How do Chinese EFL learners tackle their language learning tasks in China where there is almost no natural English language environment? What are the differences between the learning strategies and techniques employed by successful learners and the problem learners?

It was the aim of this study to investigate and analyze some characteristics of Chinese EFL learners and their learning strategies. The major focus was on oral communicative ablilties,

rather than learning English as a whole, whose nature we can not afford to account for in a limited study like this.

The purpose of the present study was fourfold:

1. To identify the learning strategies and specific techniques that Chinese EFL learners employ for developing their oral communicative abilities in China;

2. To assess the effects of certain learning strategies and techniques on oral achievement;

3. To examine certain learner factors which may affect the use of strategies and techniques, and;

4. To find out whether the learning strategies and techniques of the successful Chinese EFL learners in oral communication are similar to the kinds of good learner strategies and techniques as had proposed by Rubin(1975), Stern(1975), Naiman et al.(1978), Bialystok(1979), Wesche(1979) and Reiss(1981).

Stern's definitions of learning strategies and techniques were used in this study. According to him, learning strategies are defined as the "general tendencies or overall characteristics of the approach employed by the language learner. Specific learning techniques, on the other hand, are defined as the "particular forms of observable learning behaviour, more or less consciously employed by the learner"(1983:405).

The term oral communicative ability used in the present study is referred to as the learner's ability to use English effectively and appropriately for oral communication or interactions with native speakers of English in real life situations.

It was hypothesized that

1. The successful Chinese EFL learners as defined in terms of oral

communicative abilities employ certain strategies which the less successful learners do not or employ only weakly;

2. The strategies employed by the successful Chinese EFL learners are in general similar to the kinds of good learner strategies as proposed by Rubin(1975), Stern(1975), Naiman et al.(1978), Bialystok(1979), Wesche(1979) and Reiss(1981).

3. The Chinese EFL learners employ certain special or unique techniques due to the foreign language setting and the influences of the Chinese traditional concepts of education on foreign language teaching and learning.

Research on second language learning has indicated that the following strategies facilitate language learning: 1) an active learning strategy, 2) an explicit learning sstrategy, 3) a social learning strategy, and 4) an affective strategy (Stern,1983). Studies have also illustrated that these strategies are likely to be employed by successful learners, while less successful or less efficient learners may employ them only weakly or fail to develop them altogether (Naiman et al.1978; Bialystok,1979; Reiss,1981). It has been demonstrated that language learning is highly complex and individual, and there are many ways to learn a language successfully .Although good learners may differ in their particular learning techniques and habits, they are usually characterized by the the general strategies stated above (Naiman et al.1978, Wesche,1979).

Yu Zhen Zhong (1983) examined and described modern EFL teaching in China from the perspectives of Chinese tradictional concepts of education and the FL learning environment. He pointed out that the traditional ideas about education and the traditional ways of learning Chinese classics have had a great impact on the learning of

English. Such traditional concepts of education and the formal foreign language learning setting are most likely to affect the use and development of certain specific learning techniques of the Chinese learners.

This study consists of identification of the strategies and techniques in oral communication employed by Chinese EFL learners, and assessment of the effects of some of them on achevement. It also explores some learner characteristics which were believed to affect learning strategies and techniques. Investigations of this kind are regarded as being important from both a theoretical and a practical point of view. It was hoped that findings concerning strategies and learner characteristics of Chinese EFL learners could contribute to the improvement of our understanding of SL/FL language learning in different social contexts, under different language learning conditions, at different age and maturity levels, and at different level of language proficiency. It was also hoped that the present study could provide some practical implications and suggestions to the classroom teachers.

The present study is composed of seven chapters: 1)Introduction, 2) Literature Review, 3) Description of Subjects, Instruments, and Procedures, 4) Results, 5) Discussion, 6) Case Study of Selected Students, and 7) Conclusions.

Chapter 2 provides a general survey of the past development in strategy research in the last decade. Some of the major studies in this field are discussed with the primary focus on the approaches they employed as well as the findings. A brief discussion of the literature concerning certain affective factors is also included based on the assumption that they are closely related to learning strategies.

In Chapter 3, the subjucts the research instruments used in this study, and the procedures are described. The investigation was conducted in a foreign language institute in Guangzhou, with 60 graduating English major students as subjects. The research instruments include 1) an oral test as the criterion measure, 2) a strategies questionnaire, and 3) interviews with the most successful and the least successful students.

In the fourth chapter, the scoring and results of the oral test and the strategies questionnaire are reported, and then followed by the results of statistical analyses on them. The results of the interviews are also summarized and described.

The fifth chapter is devoted to the identification of learning strategies and techniques, and the discussion and interpretation of the statistical results. Furthermore, the major differences between the successful and unsuccessful Chinese students in strategies and techniques are analyzed and discussed.

In Chapter 6, four case studies of selected students are presented. They illustrate different types of successful and unsuccessful learning experiences in improving oral abilities. and provide supporting evidence to the strategies and techniques identified in the present study. They also demonstrate the complexity and individuality of language learning process.

In the final chapter, the major findings of this investigation are summarized. Suggestions for further research and some practical implications for classroom teachers are also provided.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

As a result of many recent studies on second language learning, various models of SLL have been proposed with the aim of identifying essential factors involved in the learning process and indicating ways in which they are likely to interact. In a model recently proposed by Stern (1983:338), five sets of factors or variables have been distinguished (see Figure 1).

In this framework, social context (box 1) is postulated to have influence on learner characteristics (box 2) and learning conditions (box 3), which are presented as determiners of the learning process (box 4), which in turn determines the learning outcomes (box 5).

The purpose of the present study is to explore the domain of the learning process (box 4) — to investigate learning strategies and techniques and to examine their effect on SLL in relation to some other variables. However, it is felt that such investigation cannot be done in isolation from other learner characteristics. Hence the necessity to have a brief survey of the literature concerning certain affective factors associated with SLL/FLL after a detailed discussion of the literature on strategy research.

2.1 Strategies and Techniques

In the model of second language learning proposed by Stern (Figure 1), the learning process "can be looked upon as consisting overtly of strategies and techniques employed by the learner, and covertly, of conscious and unconscious mental operations" (Stern, 1983:339).

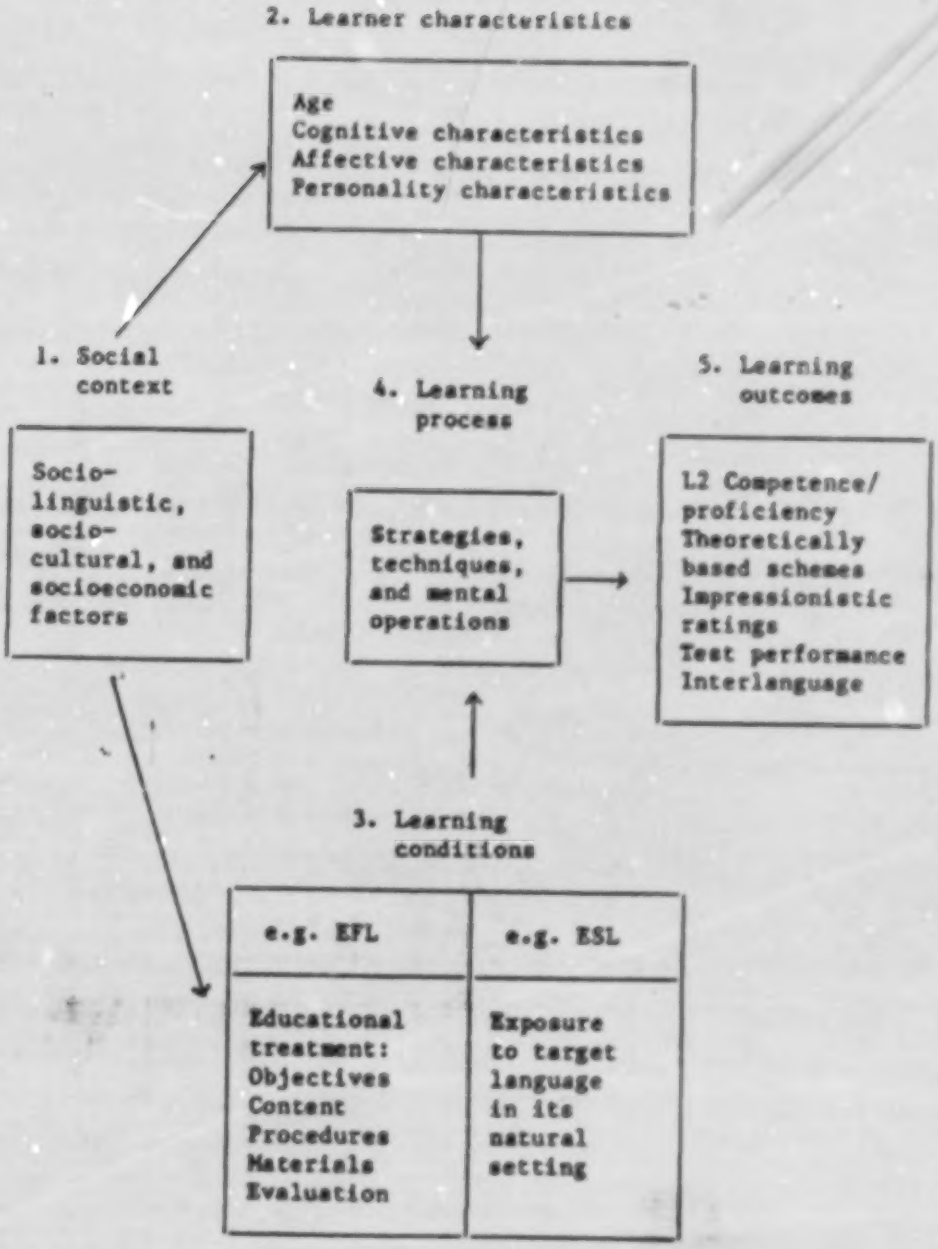

Figure 1. Stern's Model for Examination of Second Language Learning

The concept of learning strategy has not been employed in exactly the same way in strategy studies, though they all basically refer to the characteristics of learning behaviours and cognitive learning processes.

2.1.1. Rubin-Stern Inventories

In Rubin's early study (1975), strategies were defined as the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire second language knowledge (p.42).

As an experienced language teacher and learner, Rubin has made a persistent effort in studying language learning and communication strategies through her own observation and observations by other teachers. She proposed a list of learning strategies which are likely to be employed by successful learners (1975, 43):

1. The good language learner is a willing and accurate guesser.
2. The good language learner has a strong drive to communicate.
3. The good language learner is often not inhibited.
4. The good language learner is prepared to attend to form.
5. The good language learner practises.
6. The good language learner monitors his own and the speech of others.
7. The good language learner attends to meaning.

Rubin's list offers important insights into the characteristics of successful learning, and gives an idea of the kind of strategies that researchers ought to be looking for.

Another inventory was proposed by Stern in his article published in the same year (1975), which contributed some additional learning strategies. His list of ten learning strategies which are hypothesized to be required for successful learning is derived mainly from his reading of the literature of language learning, and

his rich experience as a language teacher and learner. It also reflects his interpretation of second language competence and the learning process.

Stern's definition of learning strategy is somewhat different from Rubin's. He makes a distinction between the specific, observable learning behaviours and the general approaches which are generalized from the former. He suggests that the term "strategy is best reserved for general tendencies or overall characteristics of the approach employed by the language learner," and that "techniques" be used to refer to the "particular forms of observable learning behaviours" (1983:405).

The ten strategies proposed by Stern are:

1. A personal learning style or positive learning strategies;
2. An active approach to the learning task;
3. A tolerant and outgoing approach to the target language and empathy with its speakers;
4. Technical know-how about how to tackle a language;
5. Strategies of experimentation and planning with the object of developing the new language into an ordered system and of revising this system progressively;
6. Constantly searching for meaning;
7. Willingness to practice;
8. Willingness to use the language in real communication;
9. Self-monitoring and critical sensitivity to language use; and
10. Developing the target language more and more as a separate reference system and learning to think in it (1975:312).

Rubin and Stern's inventories are both derived from common-sense observation, psychological theorizing and personal experience. Consequently they "comprise more or less similar categories divided up in somewhat different ways" (Stern, 1983:405).

In the following part of this section, the Rubin-Stern inventories will be analyzed in the light of some of the major theoretical and empirical studies in this field. It will be then

followed by a more detailed discussion of the major approaches in studying learning strategies and techniques.

2.1.1.1. Planning Strategy

It is observed that successful learners demonstrate a higher and more flexible ability to adjust themselves to new learning conditions and to develop their preferred learning techniques. They seem to be keenly aware of their advantages as well as difficulties, and have insights about their learning process and their own learning techniques.

This postulation has recently drawn support from a study by Reiss (1981), who reported a high specificity of the responses by the successful students vs. the generality of the responses by the unsuccessful students on their learning techniques.

Similar findings have been obtained by Wesche (1979), who found that the highly successful learners "in most cases appeared quite insightful about their ways of learning" (p.423). However, evidence in another study by Cohen and Aphek (1978) shows that "the poor learner does not necessarily lack organizational strategies" (cited in Reiss, 1981:125). Obviously more studies are needed before we can reach a more definite answer.

In a recent article, Wenden (1983) gives a review of some of the literature that deals with self-directed learning, a concept which illustrates how learners intervene consciously in their learning. Research on self-directed learning in adult education, as discussed in Wenden's article, "established the fact that adult learners do initiate and organize their own learning activities" (p.108). Projects that focused on self-direction in language

learning were also conducted (Abe, Henner-Stanchina, and Smith 1975; Henner-Stanchina 1976; Moulden 1978, 1980 — cited in Wenden 1983) to develop and implement learning schemes that would train learners in self-directed learning. The results "have indicated the workability of such schemes -- in terms of learner attitudes, number of drop outs, and productivity of learning" (Op.cit.:110). In the same article, Wenden reports a study conducted by herself (Wenden 1981) which "revealed that learners self-direct their learning by engaging in eight processes" (op.cit.:110).

2.1.1.2. Active Strategy

The good language learner employs a very active approach to his learning task. "He selects learning objectives for himself" and "actively initiates the learning process and adapts the language learning activities to his own life" without leaning passively or too heavily on the teacher or the courses (Stern,1975:312).

Wesche reported that the most successful learners were found to be "characterized by a high level of personal initiation and sustained effort in the language learning process" (1979:426).

Seliger's study (1983) also provided supporting evidence to this postulation. The researcher examined the relationship between learner achievement and the types of interaction practice pattern exhibited by the learner in language classroom. He classified learners into two categories at the two extremes of a continuum of learner behaviour: High Input Generators (those learners who practised language by initiating interactions with the teachers and fellow students, thereby generating more personalized input to themselves) and Low Input Generators (learners who played a passive

role' in the language classroom and did little to get input directed at them). The results indicate that "learners who initiate interaction are better able to turn input into intake. This increased intake has an effect on the rate of second language development" (p.257).

2.1.1.3. A Tolerant and Outgoing Approach and Empathy Strategy

Successful learners are believed to tackle their learning tasks with an open and relaxed attitude. This feature is referred to by Rubin as "being not inhibited" in learning and using the target language (1975:46).

Research on cognitive and affective factors has indicated that factors such as tolerance to ambiguity, an outgoing attitude to language learning, classroom anxiety, fear of rejection, inhibition and empathy are all related positively or negatively to second language achievement.

2.1.1.4. Formal Strategy

The good language learner has or develops "a certain technical 'know-how' about language and language learning" (Stern,1975:313). In Rubin's words, they are "prepared to attend to form" (1975:45).

The study by Naiman et al (1978) provided evidence to this claim. Most of the successful adult learners indicated in the study that in addition to the unconscious and natural absorption process, their learning involved a highly conscious and systematic process in which they constantly practised, analyzed, classified, questioned and looked for explanations and rules of the language system (p. 11).

2.1.1.5. Experimental Strategy

Hypothesizing and revising in order to develop an ordered system is now commonly recognized as an essential characteristic in language learning. Reiss found in her empirical study (1981) that "as learners develop the second language into a separate reference system, they are more prone to making overgeneralization errors within the target language than to transfer errors" (p. 122).

Other experimental characteristics include guessing or inferencing. Carton's study (1971) provided evidence of the facilitative effects of inferencing on comprehension. However such findings were not replicated in a study by Bialystok, in which the reported use of inferencing did not correlate with the variance of learners' achievement (1979:392).

2.1.1.6. Semantic Strategy

Good learners always strive to "understand acts of communication in as full a sense as possible." They search "not only the surface meaning but also the underlying sociocultural meaning and connotations" (Stern,1975:315). It is this flexible and sensible approach to meanings that enables them to understand messages, to interpret the speaker's intention and to give appropriate responses.

2.1.1.7. Practice Strategy

Good learners are usually known as being active and persistent in practice, both inside and outside the classroom. The specific techniques for practice vary according to age, needs, personality, proficiency level, cognitive style and many other factors. Yet they

all contribute to a regular and frequent exposure and practice in the target language which greatly facilitate internalization, paving the way for fluent and successful communication. Wesche's study (1979) has confirmed this observation.

2.1.1.8. Communicative Strategy

In addition to their willingness to practise, good learners demonstrate a strong drive to use the target language for communicative purposes. This has been commonly regarded to be most essential for real success in second language learning.

Several investigational studies (e.g. Naiman et al. 1978; Wesche, 1979) have indicated that successful learners often consciously seek and create opportunities to imporve their communicative skills by using their newly acquired competence in real communicative situations. Such communicative activities include talking with members of the target language group, reading books, newspapers or magazines, watching TV, listening to radio programs, or taking notes in class in the target language.

These findings have been supported by the results of statistical analyses in a study by Bialystok (1979), which showed that "the strategy most responsible for achievement on all tasks (reading, writing, listening and grammar) was functional practice" (using the target language for communicative purposes) (p.390).

This postulation is further substantiated by the findings in Seliger's study (1983) which demonstrated that "learners who maintained high levels of interaction in the second langauge, both in the classroom and outside, progressed at a faster rate than learners who interacted little in the classroom" (p. 262).

2.1.1.9. Monitoring Strategy

Good learners are believed to be circumspect, self-critical, cautious and sensitive to language use. They monitor their own speech as well as others'.

An attempt has been made by Bialystok (1979) to correlate the reported use of monitoring strategy with achievement measure. It showed a positive effect on achievement in all the four tasks (reading, writing, listening and grammar), yet only reaching the significant level for the grammar task (p.392).

2.1.1.10. Internalization Strategy

This last strategy listed in Stern's inventory is referred to as the ability to develop the second language more and more as a separate reference system and to learn to think in it. It is regarded as an important characteristic that discriminates good and poor learning (Stern,1975:315).

However, little has been done empirically to investigate the specific techniques characteristic of this strategy that learners employ and to assess their effect on learning achievement.

Although the Rubin-Stern inventories are "general" and "highly speculative," as the authors have pointed out, they have played an important role in strategy research. They not only marked a new and fruitful direction in research on second language learning, but also laid the basis for more systematic and deeper investigation and experimentation. As for further research, Rubin has suggested that the following factors be taken into consideration: 1) the learning

task, 2) the learning stage, 3) the learner's age, 4) the context, 5) individual style, and 6) cultural difference in cognitive learning style (1975:49).

Since then, there has been an ever-increasing awareness of the importance of learning strategy research, and a number of empirical studies have been conducted with the attempt to identify a list of strategies employed by successful language learners and to verify their roles in language proficiency (e.g. Naiman et al. 1978; Bialystok and Frohlich, 1977, 1978; Bialystok, 1979; Cohen and Robbins, 1976; Wesche, 1977; Reiss, 1981; Rubin, 1981; Rubin and Henze, 1980). These studies are important both in their findings and research methodology.

2.1.2. Major Approaches to Strategy Research

The remaining part of this section will be a brief survey of some of the major strategy studies, with primary focus on the approaches employed and then the findings.

2.1.2.1. Identification of Strategies and Techniques

One approach which is commonly used in strategy research is to probe the learning strategies of some successful learners through classroom behavioural observations or elicitation techniques such as intensive retrospective interviews or questionnaires.

2.1.2.1.1. The Good Language Learner Project

An important effort based on this approach is the Good Language Learner project of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education conducted by Naiman, Frohlich, Stern and Todesco (1978).

The study consisted of two parts: the Adult Interview Study and the Main Classroom Study.

In the interview study, 32 adult learners who were recommended as highly proficient were given intensive retrospective interviews in which they were asked to rate their second language competence, describe their learning experiences, the learning techniques they employed, and their feelings about them. The results showed that the interview study was very productive and successful. It "generally confirmed the kinds of strategies which the Rubin-Stern inventories had suggested" (1978:99). It proved that

> good language learners take advantage of potentially useful learning situations, and if necessary create them. They develop learning techniques and strategies appropriate to their individual needs (op.cit.:25).

The reported learning experiences of the interviewees show that "language success is not so much attributed to an 'innate gift,' as to a conscious effort and constant involvement" (op.cit.:25).

In addition to the confirmation of the kinds of strategies suggested in earlier studies, the interview study "also illustrated the complexity and individuality of each learning situation and career" (op.cit.:99).

Another important finding of the interview study is the necessity of integrating strategy study with the study of other learner factors such as cognitive styles, attitudinal and motivational factors, personality traits and learning environment (op.cit.:27).

Based on the results of the interview study, the researchers suggested the necessity to "reduce and order the Stern list of ten

strategies to a more systematic arrangement of five" (op.cit.:99):

1. Active task approach;
2. Realization of language as a system;
3. Realization of language as a means of communication and interaction;
4. Management of affective demands;
5. Monitoring of L2 performance.

On the whole, such retrospective interviews proved to be a useful research technique. They enable the investigators to elicit and obtain information on the learner's strategies and techniques and their insights into them. Such information has proved to be difficult, or in some cases impossible to obtain by purely classroom observation, as it will be discussed later in this chapter. This was especially true for personal insights. However, the investigators felt that "many aspects of the learning process were probably missing by this particular approach (retrospective interview)" (op.cit.:99). This is mainly caused by the limitation set by the interview schedule previously constructed by the researchers on the basis of their conceptualization of the learning process and strategies.

In addition to this relatively high degree of external intervention[1], the recency of the events also affects the accuracy of the reported data — quite a lot may have been forgotten due to the long gap between the learning experience and the investigation.

Even if the learner's memory is still fresh, data on learning processes collected in this way is only productive to a certain extent, because, as Cohen stated, "the focus is only on the subset of learning strategies that the learner is conscious of," but not the information on the unconscious processes (1983:2).

Another problem which arose from the interview study is of a statistical nature, for "not all interviewees provided specific information on identical topics," especially in the semi-directed part of the interview (Naiman et al. 1978:16).

The main classroom study was an empirical investigation of the roles of some of the critical variables which were believed to affect language learning, including learning strategies. The basic assumption for the integrated study is that "strategies of successful language learning could not be identified in isolation from other learner characteristics and learning situations" (op.cit.:27). The investigation included criterion measures of linguistic competence (a listening comprehension test and an imitation task), which were used to correlate with measures of cognitive styles, personality and other affective characteristics, as well as learning behaviours observed in the classroom.

Since the main purpose of the Good Language Learner study was "to identify learning strategies and techniques," it was felt "to be essential to observe good and poor language learners objectively in their actual learning environments," though it "can only contribute to the recording of overt language behaviour" (op.cit.:33). An observation schedule was developed which focused on certain learning behaviours such as hand-raising, callout, reaction to lack of comprehension, correct responses, etc.

Contrary to the investigators' expectation, strict observation of classroom learning activities failed to reveal any significant information on specific learning techniques or strategies, but only some fairly obvious indicators such as activeness of participation in activities (op.cit.:99, 65). In addition, the results of

statistical analysis on the data "did not differ greatly from grade to grade and from criterion to criterion" (op.cit.:56).

2.1.2.1.2. Rubin's Study

In her 1981 study, Rubin reports on her efforts to identify the cognitive processes and strategies used in second language learning and the problems encountered in observing the specific cognitive strategies. In this recent article, Rubin develops the strategies she outlines in her earliest article. First of all, she distinguishes cognitive processes from cognitive strategies.

> Cognitive processes are those general categories of actions which contribute directly to the learning process. Cognitive strategies are the specific actions which contribute directly to the learning process" (p. 118).

She makes a list of cognitive processes which contribute directly to language learning:

1) clarification/verification,
2) monitoring,
3) memorization,
4) guessing/inductive inferencing vs. deductive reasoning,
5) practising (op.cit.:118).

Data on strategies were collected through classroom observation, student self-reports, and individual diary studies (the latter will be discussed in a following section).

Rubin and her colleagues reported problems similar to those found in Naiman et al's study:

> Observations of a regular classroom yielded meager results for the following reasons: 1) teachers focus on accuracy and not on the learning process and 2) there was no opportunity to question students on how they arrived at particular answers during class" (op.cit.:119).

However, the observation of a tutorial (with one student and one teacher) and a communicative activity "the strip story" conducted by the same investigator turned out to be much more productive in revealing learning strategies than classroom observation (1981:119). An explanation might be that regular classes are too highly structured for learners to display any observable techniques. The tutorial and the strip story activity, on the other hand, put the learners into a much more active and initiative position, which enables them to display their overt and systematic learning techniques and strategies. Rubin's findings indicate that behavioural observations can be revealing and productive when the learning activities are more student-centered and communicative.

2.1.2.1.3. Wesche's Study

The findings in Wesche's study (1979) are encouraging. In his empirical study, Wesche attempted to identify and define learning behaviours characteristics of highly successful adult students in an intensive language training program through classroom behavioural observation and interviews with several of the highest and lowest achievers (p.413). The results of both the classroom observation and interviews suggest that

> the most successful learners, while differing in their particular learning techniques and L2 practice activities, are those who use their exposure time in the L2 actively, and who seek to extend this out of the classroom; who actively rehearse new material; who exploit its rich associational possibilities both through conscious association-making and meaningful practice in the L2; and who seek knowledge about the target language (op.cit.:426).

All these further confirm the kinds of strategies proposed in the Rubin-Stern inventories. The author concluded that "behavioural observation in the classroom and elicitation techniques with L2 students can make an important contribution to our understanding of how languages are acquired" (op.cit.:427).

2.1.2.1.4. Reiss's Study

Another major study which merits our attention is the one conducted by Reiss (1981). In her study, the researcher tried to develop a profile of the specific learning techniques employed by the successful learners, and to inquire into the differences in the learning techniques of successful vs. unsuccessful learners through questionnaires. The subjects were given questionnaires in which they were presented with some hypothetical learning situations, and were asked to specify the techniques they would be likely to use. The subjects were also asked to list the learning techniques and strategies which had helped them most in second language learning.

When looking at the data, the author was "struck by the specificity of the 'A' responses (by highly successful students) vs. the generality of the 'C/D' responses (by unsuccessful students)" (1981:125). It appears that an awareness of the learning process and one's own learning techniques may be characteristic of successful learning, particularly in a formal learning setting.

One of the advantages of the elicitation techniques used by Reiss in her study is that by setting up hypothetical learning situations and using open-ended questions, the type and range of responses are less controlled or limited by the investigator, thus lowering the degree of external intervention.

2.1.2.2. Assessment of the Roles of Strategies

Another approach is the one developed by Bialystok, who has attempted to assess the roles of learning strategies through experimental tasks based on a theoretical model. Bialystok's model for language learning investigation contains three levels of functioning -- input, knowledge and output (1977:2)(see Figure 2).

This model incorporates conceptualization of the Monitor and explicit vs. implicit linguistic knowledge as postulated by Krashen (1976). It also draws the distinction between formal and functional (communicative) practice.

In this model, learning strategies are defined as "the approaches consciously employed by the language learner which have the effect of relating the various knowledge sources to language outcomes" (Bialystok, 1977:5).

Four strategies were derived from the Rubin-Stern-Naiman inventories, and were examined on the basis of the model: formal practising, functional practising, monitoring and inferencing. These four strategies are described in terms of two parameters - purpose and modality, as presented in the following chart:

Purpose / Modality	Formal	Functional
Oral	Formal practice Monitoring	Functional practice Inferencing
Written	Formal practice Monitoring	Functional practice Inferencing

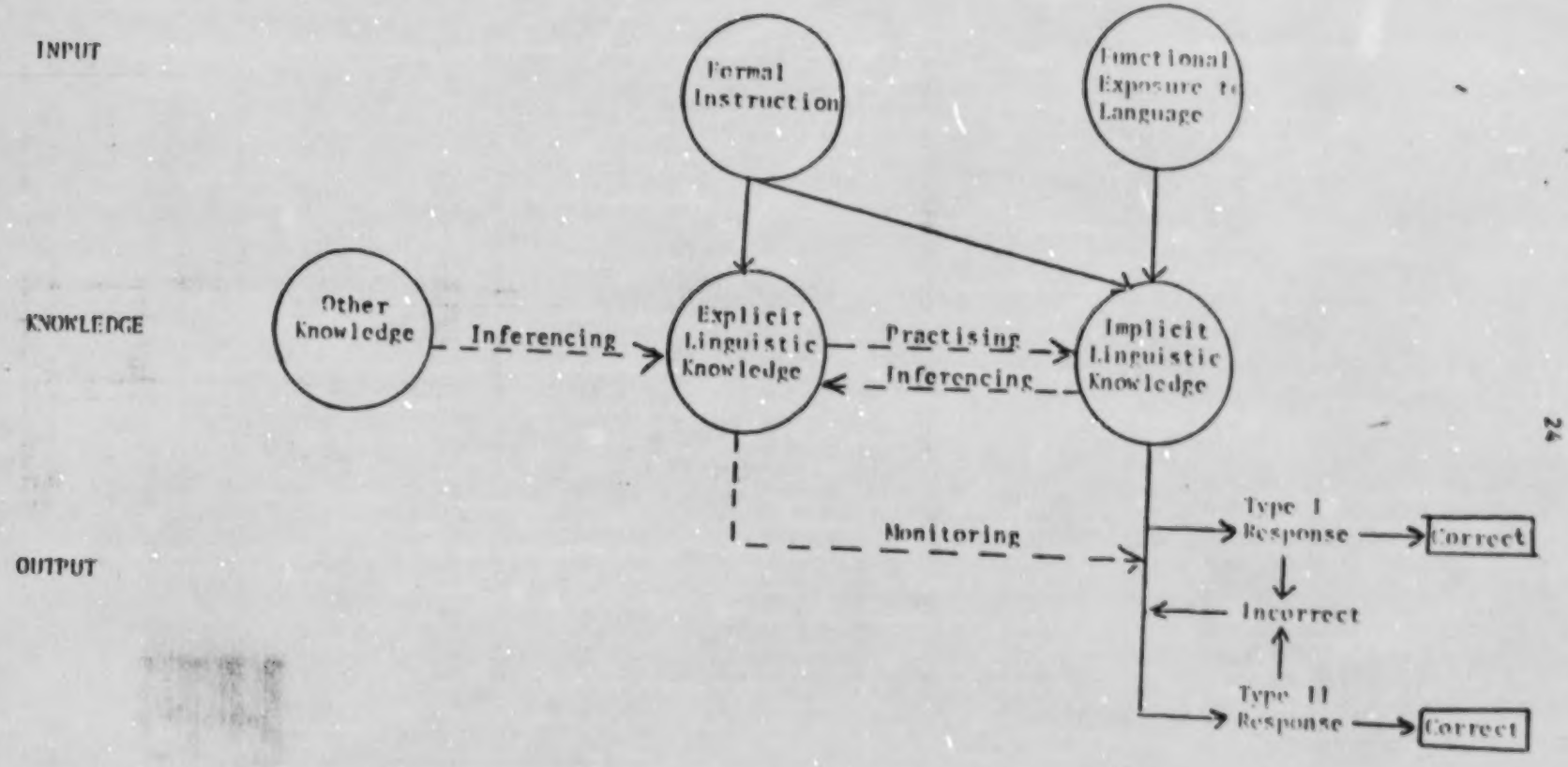

Figure 2. Bialystok's Model for Language Learning Investigation

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In a set of experiments (Bialystok and Frohlich, 1977, 1978; Bialystok, 1979), questionnaires were constructed to assess the extent to which the learners use each of the strategies. The reported frequencies of each strategy used were then analyzed in relation to the criterion measures in the four corresponding cells -- formal/oral, formal/written, functional/oral, functional/written. However, the results from these studies turned out to be highly complex and inconsistent, and need very careful interpretation.

In the 1977 study, Experiment I, the use of monitoring was found to be the most important predictor in achievement in reading for one school, inferencing was much weaker in predicting, practising was not found to be important at all (p.17). Experiment II attempted a more precise examination of the role of inferencing, and provided supporting evidence for the learning model proposed by the researchers (op.cit.:22).

In the 1979 study, Bialystok reported that "functional practice consistently accounted for significant portions of the variance; monitoring showed a strong positive trend" (significant only in one of the three grades); "inferencing was without any effect;" and formal practice appeared to show a small positive relationship to achievement in one grade but a significant negative one in another (p.387).

The fact that functional practice was found to be the most responsible for achievement on all tasks indicates that general exposure to the target language in communicative situations facilitates the improvement of overall language proficiency.

When discussing the findings concerning the role of formal practice, the author postulated that "additional formal practice

after a particular point no longer facilitates performance" (1979:390). In other words, after reaching a certain stage in language learning, engaging in increasingly greater amounts of formal practice, most often by lower achievers, does not necessarily help improve performance effectively. Thus Bialystok suggested that time and effort may be better spent in functional practice (op.cit.:390). Her suggestion has significant and practical implications for language teaching and learning.

2.1.2.3. Diary Studies

A third approach to strategy research is in-depth longitudinal case studies through diary report on second language learning by sophisticated learners. It differs from the first two approaches in that, instead of searching for common characteristics of a particular group of learners, it focuses on in-depth, introspective and longitudinal case studies, "examining the social-psychological profile in SLL of an individual," as pointed out by the Schumanns (1977:241).

2.1.2.3.1. The Schumanns' Study

During their four months of learning Persian and Arabic, the Schumanns kept "detailed journals of all cross-cultural and linguistic events which each of them experienced as relevant to their SLL" (1977:241). These data were later analyzed with a primary focus on individual characteristics. A few important personal variables affecting their SLL were identified (p.248):

a. nesting patterns,
b. reactions to dissatisfaction with teaching methods,

c. motivation for choice of materials,
d. transaction anxiety,
e. desire to maintain one's own language learning agenda, and
f. eavesdropping vs. speaking as a language learning strategy.

The researchers felt that

> This approach was very productive because it revealed idiosyncratic patterns of behaviour that seriously affected their language learning and that had not been specifically identified as important in previous studies (1977:243).

2.1.2.3.2. Rivers' Study

W. M. Rivers, a specialist in language pedagogy and a sophisticated language learner, also recorded her experiences of learning her fifth non-native language for a case study (1979). Due to her rich experience in language teaching and learning, she was highly conscious of her learning behaviours and the techniques she used. Her diary study provided valuable insights into SLL, and all the specific learning techniques she identified reinforced the postulations in the Rubin-Stern-Naiman inventories.

Like the other SL learners, Rivers experienced frustration caused by non-communication and interference from other languages she had learned before. All this made her more sympathetic with SL learners, and she made some valuable suggestions for SL teaching and learning.

2.1.2.3.3. Rubin's Study

Rubin has also tried the method of learner self-reporting and found "directed diary reporting an extremely useful way to obtain data about cognitive strategies" (1981:120). The problem is that not all students are good at reporting on learning techniques, and

as a result, a lot of the student reports turned out to be quite vague and not very informative (op.cit.:120-122).

One of the merits of such an approach seems to be the flexibility in data collecting. Data can be collected in a variety of contexts, the informant can jot down a brief note during a class or at a break, or report in more detail after class, in the library or at home. In short, at any place and at any time, as the informant feels the necessity. By doing so, a lot more learning behaviour and cognitive processes can be noted down before they are forgotten.

Another advantage of this approach is the low degree of external intervention. A sophisticated language learner can write diary entries along personal lines. Consequently the scope and depth of the variables observed and described would not be limited or interfered by any prescription of the learning process made by the external investigator.

Thirdly, such in-depth case studies enable researchers to explore the idiosyncratic characteristics of individuals, which are as important as the common characteristics of a group of learners, and yet commonly overlooked in studies aiming at the latter.

2.2. Affective Factors

In the model of second language learning proposed by Stern (Figure 1), it is suggested that learner characteristics directly affect the learning process.

It is a common observation that, in spite of a good teacher, effective learning methods, the best learning environment, and a

high level of language learning aptitude, the learner can still fail because of an affective block. In fact, this is one of the most common problems that a SL teacher has to face. Brown once rightly pointly out that

> ..of the major facets of human behaviour, the affective domain is the most important in governing a person's success in second language learning. After all, human behaviour in general is dominated by emotion (1981:113).

The role of affective factors in SLL has interested researchers since the early fifties. Research in their problem area during the last three decades has been mainly concerned with three components: 1) attitude, 2) motivation, and 3) learner personality.

Originally, the intention of the present study was to examine all these three components of affective factors, as they are likely to influence the use of strategies and techniques. However, since a study like this could not cover such a wide range of factors, only attitudinal and motivational factors were selected to be examined.

2.2.1. Attitudes and Motivation

Motivation is defined by Brown as "an inner drive or stimulus which can ... be global, situational, or task-oriented" (1981:123). Motivation in SLL involves the learner's reasons for attempting to acquire the language.

Attitudes associated with SLL include the learner's perception of self, the native language group and culture, his attitudes towards the target language and the target language group and culture, and his attitudes towards the SL teacher and the learning environment. Studies show that "a sustained motivation to acquire a

second language was related to attitudinal characteristics of the students" (Gardner et al., 1976:199).

The most consistent and influential research on attitudinal and motivational factors associated with SLL has been those studies conducted by Gardner and Lambert (1972) and Gardner and his colleagues (e.g. Gardner et al., 1974; Gardner, et al, 1976; 1976a; Gardner and Smythe, 1981).

In their early studies (1972), Gardner and Lambert explored the relationship between learner's social attitude, values, motivation for learning a second language and second language achievement. They first worked in French-English bilingual communities in Canada, and the results yielded a high correlation between attitude/motivation and SL achievement. Then they applied the analysis to various language groups in U.S.A., and later to foreign language settings such as the Philippines. Although these studies differed in the number and nature of attitudinal/motivational variables under investigation according to the social settings, the results all confirmed the notion that "factors of an attitudinal and motivational sort play a very important role in the acquisition of a second or foreign language" (1972:134).

These findings have been replicated in another study by Gardner and his colleagues a few years later, in which they stated that "The most obvious conclusion ... is that the index of motivation is the most consistent predictor of each of the variables under consideration (aural comprehension, speech, grade, opportunities to use French)", and that motivation "demonstrated as high or higher relationships with them (the four measures mentioned above) than the measure of language aptitude" (1976a:202-3).

Studies by some other researchers have provided support to the postulation that attitudinal and motivational factors are a strong and consistent predictor of SL proficiency (Bialystok and Frohlich, 1977; Tucker, et al, 1976; Oller, et al, 1977; Naiman, et al, 1978).

Gardner has summarized most of the component of attitudinal and motivational factors in a model of motivational characteristics (see Figure 3), in which he distinguishes four main categories (1975:58). Although this model was developed with reference to French as a SL, it generally applies to SLL in a school setting.

However, some other research studies have failed to yield consistently positive correlations between attitude/motivation and SL achievement. As Oller points out in his article in 1977, there has been evidence that "the hypothesis that the relationship between attitude variables and attained language proficiency is always strong has been excluded many times" (p.177).

In a study by Bialystok and Frohlich in 1978, though attitude was found to correlate positively with one of the criterion measures (writing task), "it was weak and not replicated on the other three tasks" (reading, listening, and grammar) (p.332).

A study by Pimsleur (1964) failed to replicate the earlier findings in a study by Lambert et al.(1961) which indicated a strong relationship between attitude toward members of the target language community and target language achievement. Some other studies (Kelly:1965; Savignon:1972 - cited in Chastain, 1975) also failed to explain the variance in SL proficiency by measures of attitudinal or motivational variables.

An important issue raised by Gardner and Lambert in the study of attitude and motivation is the identification of two components

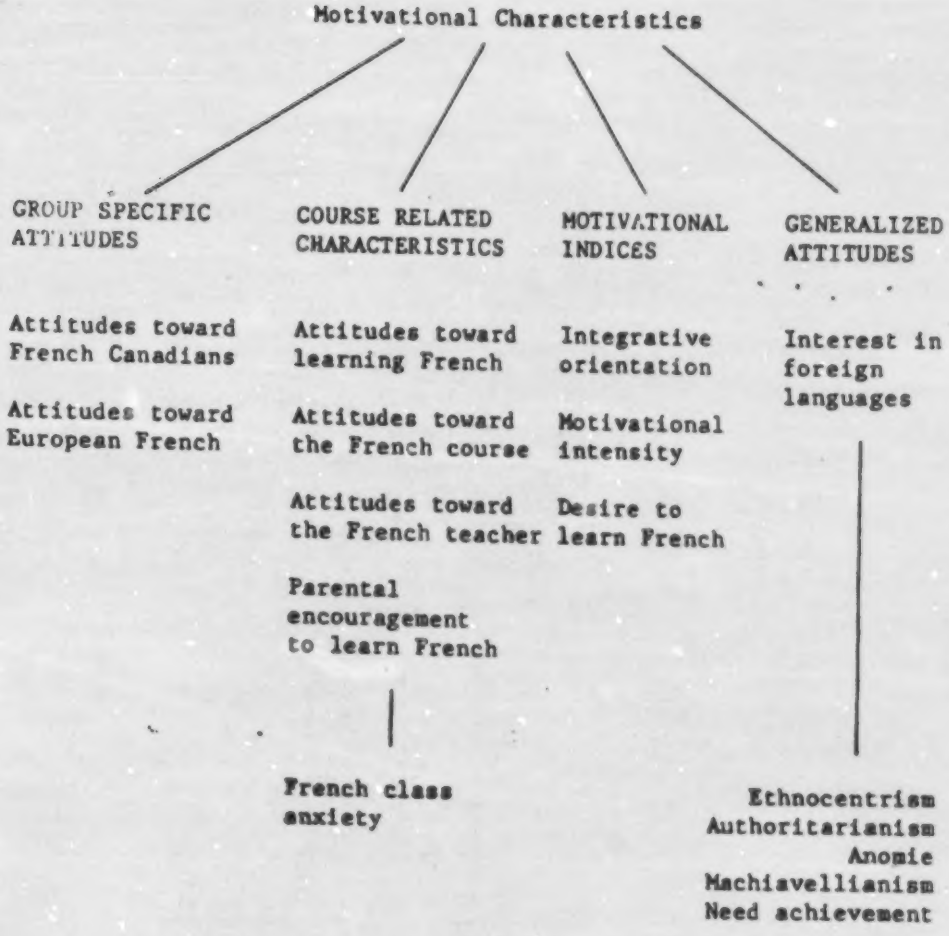

Figure 3: Gardner's model of motivational characteristics

in the motivation factor, namely integrative orientation and instrumental orientation.

Although the operational definitions of integrative motivation vary in certain studies according to the sociolinguistic context, Gardner and his colleagues pointed out that

> the underlying characteristics of the integrative motive is that it reflects a high level of drive on the part of the individual to acquire the language of a valued second-language community in order to facilitate communication with that group (Gardner et al., 1976a:199),

and "in the extreme case, it may be suggested that the individual wants actually to become a member of that group" (Gardner et al., 1974, 7:12).

Instrumental orientation, on the other hand, is defined by Oller (1977) as "a desire to acquire someone else's language in order to use that language to achieve other goals such as material advantages, a better job or a better education" (p. 180).

The early studies by Gardner and Lambert provided evidence for the claim that an integrative orientation would produce more effective learning and a higher level of attainment than an instrumental orientation (1972). Their finding was replicated in a number of studies done by the others (Bialystok and Frohlich, 1977; Spolsky, 1969).

However Gardner and Lambert's Philippine study began to change their perception of the superiority of integrative orientation. The Philippine study showed that "in settings where there is an urgency about mastering a second language ..... the instrumental approach to language study is extremely effective" (1972:141). Their conclusion has been supported by a study by Lukmani (1972). It was

even found that, with colonized populations such as Mexican-Americans, success in SLL is accompanied by an "anti-integrative motivation" (Oller, Baca, and Vigil, 1977; cited in Oller, 1977:182) or "fear of assimilation" (Clement, 1979; Taylor et al. 1977; cited in Stern, 1983:378).

All these results indicate that the motivational orientation associated with SLL varies according to the social settings. An integrative motivation seems to be more important in social setting where the acquisition of a second language is "neither necessary nor an accepted fact in the life" (Schumann, 1978:168). Whereas in other social settings, especially in developing countries, instrumental motivation plays a decisive role, for the ability to use a foreign language is often a prerequisite for better jobs, education or social and economic advancement.

In a recent study conducted by Clement and Kruidenier (1983), the contradictory results obtained in previous studies of the relative importance of different orientations are traced to ambiguities pertaining to the definitions of orientations and to the influence of the milieu on the SL acquisition process. The researchers assess the influence of ethnicity, milieu, and target second language on the emergence of orientations. The results suggest the existence of four separate and independent orientations which are common to all groups: instrumental, friendship, travel, and knowledge orientations. In addition, five orientations are obtaind which pertain to specific combinations of ethnicity, target language, and milieu. They are: 1) the desire for greater involvement with known groups, 2) the recognition of the importance of a visibel minority, 3) Anglophone's interest in control of

pragmatic factors, 4) interest in sociocultural aspects of the target language group, and 5) a specific interest in academic success (p. 286).

Further and deeper studies are needed before we can have more definitive explanations of these phenomena.

2.3. Summary

On the whole, research on second language learning strategies is still in its infancy, many questions concerning the learning process and strategies still remain unanswered. Attempts have been made in the last decade to identify and verify specific learning techniques and strategies which are believed to account for successful learning. As a result, serval inventories of good learner strategies have been proposed by various researchers. These inventories provide insights into some of the common characteristics of successful learning, which have greately enriched our understanding of the learners. Studies of learning strategies and techniques have also offered practical implication for language teaching and learning. Nevertheless, these strategy lists are by no means complete, but are highly hypothetical and tentative, subject to further confirmation and modification through investigation and experimentation.

Progress has also been made in the exploration and development of research techniques. Data collecting techniques employed in the studies include classroom behavioural observation, questionnaires, interviews and learner-reports in diary form, of which the last three have proved most productive.

While questionnaires are generally used to discover something in common within a group, diary studies mainly focus on indiosyncratic style and characteristics of individual, introspectively or retrospectively. Interviews, however, can serve either purpose, depending on the nature of the study.

In order to deepen our understanding of the second language learning process and the learner, further research is called for "in different social contexts, under different language learning conditions, at different age and maturity levels, and at different levels of proficiency" (Stern, 1983:412).

Notes

1. "External intervention" and "recency of the events" are two terms used by A.D. Cohen in his article "Researching Second-Language Learning Strategies: How Do We Get the Information?", a paper presented at the Annual TESOL Convention, Toronto, 1983.

Chapter 3

Description of Subjects, Instruments and Procedures

The investigation was conducted in Guangzhou Foreign Languages Institute (GFLI) in Guangdong Providence. This institute is one of many tertiary level institutes for foreign language instruction and cross-cultural education in China. The general educational goal of such foreign languages institutes is to train interpreters, translators, language teachers and people working in foreign trade or foreign affairs departments where foreign languages are used.[1] Students are recent secondary school graduates who have had some years of experience in foreign language learning before entering college. During the first two years in their 4-year program, students receive formal and systematic training for overall foreign language proficiency in the four basic skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). In their senior years, they have advanced courses in reading, composition, oral interpretation and written translation. They also have optional courses in Western literature or linguistics. In addition to the language courses, students are also required to take courses in philosophy, political economics, Chinese literature, world history and geography, and a second foreign language.

3.1. Subjects

The subjects chosen for this study were graduating students (Year 4) of the English Department of GFLI. There were 6 classes in

year 4. Due to the limited number of native speaker oral examiners and time available for the investigation, only 3 classes were involved in this study. No background information about the students' proficiency levels was used in choosing the classes. The total sample consisted of 60 students.

The general background information about the subjects included sex, age, years of experience of learning English before entering college, and home city/town. Of the 60 subjects, 31 (52%) were male, 29 (48%) were female. They were between 19 to 25 years old (average age:21). More than half of the students (64%) had had 1-3 years of experience of learning English before coming to the institute, 27% had had 4-5 years, and 9% had had more than 5 years. Of the total sample, 46% came from big cities like Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, 18% from medium-sized cities, 36% from small cities or towns.

The variation of years of EFL learning experience before entering college did not have as much effect on the students' EFL proficiency as it may have seemed. Although some students had had 2 or 3 years of EFL learning experience more than the others at their middle school, they did not actually learn much, mainly due to the limited amount of time spent on the English course at school[2], the lack of input materials and teaching equipment, as well as the English proficiency level of their teachers. By the time they entered the institute, they had covered some basic grammar of English, had a small and passive English vocabulary and a working knowledge of IPA. They could also read simple passages at a very slow speed. As far as their ability to use English is concerned, they were practically no better than raw beginners[3]. Consequently,

their starting points in EFL learning at college were considered as being similar. This is further substantiated by the fact that though all students passed the national higher education entrance examinations, they were not "good enough" to be enrolled in the most famous universities and institutions which chose only the top candidates.[4] Considering the above factors, it is felt that the variable of students' entrance level of EFL proficiency at college was relatively controlled for.

Another variable which should be noted is the English instruction the students received at college. During their three and a half years of college life, the students had had the same basic and advanced English courses, used the same textbooks and other teaching materials. Since teachers teaching the same course met regularly to discuss teaching methodology and prepare teaching materials and activities, their teaching methodologies and classroom activities were usually quite similar.[5] With all these factors taken into consideration, the variable of formal English classroom instruction at college is regarded as being stable.

Of the 60 subjects who took the oral test, two failed to turn up to answer the strategies questionnaire. This brought the sample size down to 58.

Based on the results of the oral test, 20 subjects were chosen for an in-depth interview: the top 10 and bottom 10. Of the top 10 students, 7 were male, 3 were female. In the bottom group, there were also 7 male students and 3 female students. Since one student in the bottom group did not come to the interview, the actual number of interviewees was 19.

3.2. Description of Instruments

To identify learning strategies and verify their effects on oral communicative proficiency, data on specific learning techniques employed by the subjects are needed. Since quite a lot of specific learning techniques are unobservable in regular classroom activities, it was decided to try a learner reporting technique: questionnaires. Thus a questionnaire on learning techniques relevant to the Chinese EFL learning situation needed to be developed.

Since in the questionnaire, it was only practical to focus on a limited number of factors, it was felt desirable to obtain more in-depth information about the learners, especially their idiosyncratic learning styles and personal insights through other channels. To achieve the above purpose, the questionnaire was supplemented by interviews with the highest and lowest achievers in oral communication as defined by a criterion measure.

As for the criterion measure of oral proficiency, a communicative-oriented oral test was needed. Such an oral test should be able to tap and assess the learner's ability to handle authentic oral interactions with native speakers of English, and should be relevant to the Chinese situation. Since an appropriate oral test was not available locally, one was developed for the present study.

3.2.1. Strategies Questionnaire

3.2.1.1. Part I

The questionnaire developed for the present study consisted of three parts (see Appendix I). Part I was adapted from the

questionnaire used by Reiss in her study (1981). In this part, subjects were asked to specify and describe the learning techniques which had helped them most in improving oral abilities, both productively and receptively. The questions were presented in Chinese. The students were expected to use their mother tongue in answering the questions, so that their description would not be hindered by any difficulty caused by the target language.

The purpose of Part I was to identify the specific learning techniques in oral communication employed by the students and to explore how they view their learning processes and techniques without any prior discussion of EFL learning strategies. Furthermore, such open-ended questions might enable the learners to give free responses, which might reveal some idiosyncratic characteristics of their EFL learning.

3.2.1.2. Part II .

In Part II, three learning strategies were derived from the Rubin-Stern inventories and examined in the Chinese context: 1) formal practice, 2) functional practice, and 3) monitoring. In this study, the definition of practice (including both formal practice and functional practice) is restricted to exposure to the target language arranged by the learner beyond the formal classroom requirements, as defined by Bialystok (1979:373). In other words, the researcher is mainly interested in finding out what conscious attempts the learners made in order to increase their exposure to and practice in the target language beyond the formal classroom practice required by the teacher or the course. Accordingly, formal practice strategy is referred to as the conscious attempts made to

increase the exposure to and exercise of the language in order to master the language forms. Functional practice strategy, in contrast, refers to the efforts made to increase the opportunities to use the language for communicative purposes.

It should be stressed that there is no clear dividing line in reality between these two types of practice, due to the "inherent unity of meaning and form in language," as Bialystok pointed out (1979:374). The balance of focus between practising the language code and conveying meaning is only a matter of degree. Thus the classification of learning activities and techniques can only be done on a hypothetical continuum of formal/functional language use, according to their predominant characteristics, as suggested by Bialystok.

The use of formal practice and functional practice strategies was examined by presenting the subjects with a variety of activities which represented instances of using each of the two practice strategies, and asking them to indicate the extent to which they were engaged in those activities. Activities which mainly involved formal practice included listening and doing pattern drills, listening in order to improve pronunciation, memorizing and reciting texts, imitating, retelling stories, reading aloud, reading in order to learn vocabulary items or grammatical structures, etc. Activities which mainly focused on using the language for communication included speaking with other students and native speakers, listening and reading for comprehension, attending lectures, watching films and TV programs, thinking or talking to self in English, etc.

Monitoring as a strategy refers to the efforts made by the learner to pay attention to the use of linguistic forms and modify

any language responses. In this questionnaire, learners were asked to indicate the extent to which they monitor and correct their own speeches as well as the others'.

It was hypothesized that the use of these strategies would facilitate achievement in oral communication.

The numbers of questions concerning each strategy under consideration are presented in the following chart:

Strategy	No. of Questions
Formal Practice	10
Functional Practice	10
Monitoring	2

These 22 questions in Part II contained responses coded on a 5-point scale indicating "very often," "often," "sometimes," "rarely," and "never." The responses were assigned value of 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively. Thus higher scores would indicate greater use of the strategy.

3.2.1.3. Part III

Part III of the questionnaire presented three specific learning situations which usually occurred in their EFL learning processes: a) preparing for an oral report in class or group, b) learning new vocabulary items, and c) learning new grammatical items. The subjects were asked to check any of the techniques listed which applied to their own cases. The merit of such a technique lies in easy computation.

In short, the aim of the questionnaire was to obtain quantitative information about the use of strategies by each subject. It was hoped that certain reported use of strategies would be correlated with the criterion measure of the learners' oral proficiency.

3.2.2. Interview Schedule

The interview schedule (see Appendix II) covered a variety of aspects including self-evaluation, personal interest in EFL learning, learning style, independence to the teachers or courses, and personal insights into the learning process and strategies. Categories related to these issues were isolated, and a set of questions and subquestions were developed for each of them.

The first set of questions referred to the learners' personal preference for a particular modality in language learning. Interviewees would be asked whether they had more interest in learning to speak and understand the spoken language, or in learning to read, write and translate, and then give some reasons. They would also be expected to self-evaluate their achievement in the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing at college.

The second set of questions aimed at exploring the relationship between success/failure in EFL learning and learners' motivation.

The third set of questions examined learning style. Interviewees would be asked to comment on a statement about language learning styles (i.e. conscious and systematic learning vs. unconscious and intuitive learning).

The fourth set of questions was used to elicit the learners' opinions about the role of memorization in FL learning. The

subjects would be asked about their experiences in using memory in EFL learning, and whether they had developed some specific techniques to help memorize more effectively.

The fifth set of questions referred to the students' dependence/ independence in language learning. Students were expected to indicate how much they preferred to be guided by the teachers or to be left alone and learn the language in their own way at various learning stages.

The last set of questions was concerned with the learners' perception of their own success/failure in relation to their learning strategies and techniques.

3.2.3. Criterion Measure

The oral test for evaluating the subjects' oral communicative proficiency in the present study was developed using ideas from the Test of Oral Interaction in a series of examinations of Communicative Use of English as a Foreign Language deviced by the Royal Society of Arts Examination Board in Britain (the RSA Tests).[7]

The oral test was administered in the form of face-to-face interactions with native speakers of English, with the focus on the learner's productive skills. The test consisted of five items which aimed at assessing the abilities to give information, instruction, description, opinions, reasoning and justification.

3.2.3.1. Content

The first item was "Describing your home town." It was directly related to the candidate's life experience, and could serve as a warm-up question. The examiners would initiate the interaction

by asking the candidate about his/her home town, its location, size and weather there, etc. If the candidate was from Guangzhou, he/she would be expected to describe and comment on a few changes which had taken place in the last 5 years, or to introduce some of the tourist attractions in the city. If the candidate was from another city/town, he/she would be asked to make a comparison of his/her own home-town with Guangzhou.

In the second item, the candidate was required to describe or explain a working process/procedure (e.g. describing how to cook a local dish). He/she would be given half a minute to decide the content before starting the description.

Item Three required the candidate to give a short monologue on one of the following topics:

What do you think of

a). the influence of T.V.,

b). the importance of education,

c). the place of music in people's lives,

d). the importance of computers,

e). the usefulness of cassette recorders,

f). the importance of advertising,

g). the place of sports in people's lives,

h). the importance of newspapers.

These topics were written separately on cards for the candidate to select. He/she would be given one minute to prepare the content and organize the monologue.

In the fourth item, the candidates would be presented with several copies of China Daily (a Chinese newspaper in English), and asked to look at the front pages and pick a headline to elaborate

on. / They could either explain the content, or make a comment on it, which might involve description, explanation, giving personal opinions, reasoning, and/or justifying. The headlines in the newspapers covered the following areas:

a). oil in the South China Sea

b). wars in the Middle East

c). the panda in China

d). family planning

e). new archaeological findings

f). the future of Hong Kong

g). the relationship between mainland China and Taiwan, etc.

Each candidate had one minute to prepare and organize his/her thoughts. No time limit was given for this item, but the normal time was expected to last between 1-2 minutes. This item seemed to be more challenging than the previous three, for it demanded not only language abilities, but also conceptualizing as well as organizational abilities.

The final item presented to the candidate with a hypothetical communicative situation: some foreign teachers had just arrived at the institute. The candidate was asked to give them some general information about the institute, and provide some suggestions for recreation or for social contact with the students.

3.2.3.2. Criteria for Evaluation

In assessing the candidate's performance, the examiners made use of the following criteria, which were adapted from those specified in the RSA Test battery.[8]

a). Range of language forms which the candidate can make use of.

b). Accuracy in the production of the language forms (pronunciation, intonation, stress, grammatical and lexical features).

c). Appropriacy in the use of these language forms to convey meaning in specific contexts.

d). Size of contribution which the candidate makes (i.e. length and complexity of the candidate's production).

e). Fluency in conveying the spoken message.

As previously described, there were five items in the oral test. For each item, the student could receive from 1 to 10 points. The student's performance on a specific item was first scored based on a global impression by the examiner. Then accuracy was evaluated. If there were errors which affected overall intelligibility of the messages, then 1-3 points would be deducted from the initial global score, depending on the gravity of the errors.

The oral test was administered by native speakers of English, for there is some evidence that native speakers tend to be more accepting of second language communication, focusing more on the messages than the forms.[9]

To sum up, the instruments used in the present study are:

1) Strategies Questionnaire

Part I: (open-ended questions)

Specification and description of learning techniques most helpful in improving

a) listening comprehension abilities and

b) speaking abilities;

Part II: (closed questions)

Assessment of the extent to which the students used the following strategies:

a) formal practice,

b) functional practice, and

c) monitoring;

Part III: (closed questions)
Examination of use of techniques in the following three learning situations:
a) preparing for an oral report in class or group,
b) learning new vocabulary items, and
c) learning new grammatical items;

2) Interview
a) personal interest and preference in modality in EFL learning,
b) attitude and motivation,
c) learning style (conscious vs. unconscious learning),
d) memorisation in FL learning,
e) dependence/independence in FL learning,
f) the role of strategies and techniques in FL learning;

3) Oral Test (Criterion Measure)
a) describing your home town,
b) describing a working process/procedure,
c) giving a short monologue on a given topic (e.g. the influence of TV, the importance of education, etc.),
d) explaining or making a comment on a headline in a given newspaper,
e) giving newly arrived foreign teachers some general information about the institute.

3.3. Procedures

Before and during the investigation, the subjects were told that their foreign language learning experiences and their ideas about the learning processes and strategies would be extremely helpful to a research project on EFL learning in China. However the purpose and the nature of the project was not described in detail, in order not to invalidate the results. The subjects were told that the oral test would be simple and informal, and they were expected to use their code number instead of name during the whole investigation. They were also assured that none of the results of the oral test, questionnaire or interview would be revealed to their teachers, and that the results would absolutely not influence their school marks.

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3.3.1. Oral Test

The oral test was administered by two native-speaker teachers at the Guangzhou Foreign Languages Institute.[10] A time schedule was arranged for the 60 subjects to meet individually with the two native-speaker teachers in their office.

The oral test was conducted as it had been planned. Notes were taken, together with some general comments on the candidate's performance. After each of the first 6 interviews, opinions were exchanged among the examiners and the investigator to check for consistency in evaluating proficiency by the examiners using the criteria described in Description of Instruments. Each oral test took about 12 to 15 minutes, depending on how active the candidate was and how much he/she had to say. Some students appeared very active in the interaction and liked to take the initiative. They seemed to have wide interests and could talk a lot. Some others did not have as much to talk about, and dried up very soon.

3.3.2. Questionnaire

The researcher met with the students in their classrooms one evening and gave them the questionnaire to complete. Their teachers were absent. The students answered the questionnaire under the supervision of the researcher. They were assured again that the data collected would be kept confidential and would definitely not affect their school marks. They were also encouraged to be frank and honest when giving their answers, and were required to work on the questionnaire independently without consulting each other.

While the students were working on the questionnaire, the researcher walked around in the classroom, answering questions

raised by individual students. The researcher also made sure that every student handed in Part I before going on to Part II. The answering of the questionnaire lasted 30-45 minutes. As for the absentees (9%), another appointment was made. They were visited later in their classrooms and completed the questionnaire following the same procedure.

3.3.3. Interview

After the top group (the 10 highest scorers) and the bottom group (the 10 lowest scorers) had been identified, the two groups of students were interviewed individually by the researcher.

The interview followed the basic sequence of questions outlined in 3.2. In some interviews, additional questions were asked when a particular case turned out to be especially interesting. All of the 19 interviews were conducted in the interviewees' mother tongue, i.e. Mandarin or Cantonese.

Attempts were made to make the interview as informal and interesting as possible. The interviewees were encouraged to describe and comment on their own learning experiences and their observation of their fellow students' learning behaviours.

Each interview lasted between 50-90 minutes, depending on how much the interviewee was willing to share about his/her learning experience and intuition about EFL learning. In general, interviews with the top group students took a longer time. They usually seemed to be more confident and insightful about their EFL learning processes and techniques than those in the bottom group. Most of them grew very interested in the discussion, and were eager to share their personal opinions using their own and other students' experiences as examples.

It was originally planned that all interviews be recorded on audio tape. However, due to faulty preparation regarding electrical plug adapters and unavailability of electric power (brown-outs) during certain interviews, the researcher only succeeded in recording 6 interviews, which were later transcribed. For the rest of the interviews, detailed notes were taken. As a result, the conversations were slowed down somewhat for the sake of accurate note-keeping. Though these notes were checked immediately after the interview, some details may have been lost.

Notes

1. For more detailed information about EFL teaching and learning in China, read Cowan, Light, Mathews, and Tucker, 1979; Lin Hua Chen, 1983; W. Allen and D. Cook, 1982; Yu Zhen-zhong, 1983; Alan Maley, 1983; J. Scovel, 1983; T. Scovel, 1983; M. Brennan and Miao Chin-an, 1982; W. Allen and N. Spada, 1982, 1983; Alan Maley, 1984.

2. English instruction in middle school in China is not a main subject, and is usually given much less time than mathematics, Chinese, and other main courses. Senior middle school students may have 2-3 teaching hours of English instruction a week, depending on the availability of teachers and teaching equipment

3. For more detailed information about Chinese students' entrance level of English proficiency and the 4-year English program at college, see W. Allen and N. Spada, 1982.

4. In China, the most famous universities and institutes have the privilege of choosing their students from among the best candidates of the national higher education entrance examinations. Students who are enrolled into institutes like Guangzhou Foreign Languages Institute are usually the average or above-average ones among the total number of candidates who have passed the national higher education entrance examinations.

5. In Chinese universities and institutes, teachers teaching a same course usually form a "teaching group." Teachers of the same group meet regularly to prepare lessons and discuss problems in teaching and learning. They use the same teaching materials, and quite often, use the same teaching materials and methodology. For more information about the teaching group, see Yu Zhen Zhong, 1983.

6. Bialystok's definitions and classification of learning strategies were used in this study. For detailed discussion and definitions of these three strategies, see Bialystok, 1979.

7. Communicative Use of English as A Foreign Language is a series of examinations developed by the Royal Society of Arts Examinations Board in the U.K. for students wishing to operate independently in Britain. The examination is offered at three levels: Basic, Intermediate, Advanced. At each level four independent tests are offered: Reading Skills, Listening, Writing, Oral Interaction.

8. For detailed specifications of evaluation criteria for different tests at various levels of the RSA Test battery, see Examinations in the Communicative Use of English as a Foreign Language -- Specifications and Specimen Papers , R. S. A. Examination Board, 1980.

9. Jeannette Ludwig gave a survey of 12 studies dealing with native speakers' reaction to L2 use, in her article "Native-Speaker Judgements of Second-Language Learner's Efforts at Communication: A Review," 1982. One of the studies (Galloway, 1980) discussed in Ludwig's article indicated that, in making judgements on students'

L2 performance, native speakers seemed to be listening for the message, whereas non-native speaker teachers tended to focus more on grammatical accuracy.

10. The two oral test examiners were British teachers working on a communicative syllabus project in Guangzhou Foreign Languages Institute. They both had a M.A. degree in applied linguistics. They have been in China for one year and had worked mostly with the first year students. Since they had little contact with the graduating students, they had had little idea of the subjects' EFL proficiency levels before they conducted the oral test.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

In this chapter, the results of Questionnaire Part I and Part III will be first reported. This will be followed by the results of the criterion measure and Questionnaire Part II, and then the results of statistical analyses on the data collected. The information collected from the interviews will also be summarized for in-depth study of the characteristics of the successful and unsuccessful students.

4.1 Results of Questionnaire Part I

In Part I, students were asked to list in Chinese the learning techniques which had helped them the most in improving their oral skills. The answers of Group 1 students (high achievers) were compared with the answers of Group 3 students (low achievers). The results were translated into English and are reported in Table 1.

When looking at the answers provided by the two groups of students, it can be seen that the Group 1 students, on the whole, seem to employ a wider variety of techniques in their English learning. Even for the techniques reported to be employed by both groups of students, the Group 1 students tended to be more specific in description.

Nearly all students in both groups reported regularly listening to radio programs in English and various types of spoken English materials on tape. It appears that the two groups of students did not differ significantly in the types of listening activities in which they participated. However, a closer look at the rest of the

answers reveals that it is how they listened that differentiates successful from unsuccessful learning.

The Group 1 students appear to be more purposeful when dealing with their listening tasks. Several of them drew a distinction between techniques for formal practice (e.g. listening primarily in order to improve pronunciation and intonation, and/or to learn vocabulary and syntactic items) and those for functional practice (e.g. listening primarily in order to improve listening comprehension). They tend to put more stress on functional practice in their listening activities, whereas the Group 3 students seem to emphasize formal practice.

When examining the reported techniques for improving oral productive skills, it can be seen that the two groups of students reported employing more or less the same kinds of techniques characteristic of formal practice. The significant difference between the two groups of students perhaps lies in the fact that the most successful students tended to consciously involve themselves in the practice of the target language in meaningful situations in many different ways. The least successful students, by comparison, reported less variety of learning activities and techniques characteristic of functional practice, and generally used vague statements when describing them. It was also interesting to find that two students in Group 3 admitted in their answers that although they realized the crucial role of functional practice in improving oral productive skills, they did not implement those techniques often enough.

Another major difference found between the two groups of students is that nearly half of the Group 1 students stressed the

importance of extensive reading in facilitating the general improvement of oral abilities. As for those in Group 3, only two students mentioned reading after class as a means of enlarging vocabulary. A student in Group 1 reported that keeping a diary in English at college helped to improve his oral productive skills.

Table 1 Results of Questionnaire Part I

A. Question 1: What strategies or techniques have helped you most in improving your listening comprehension abilities?

Answers of Group 1 Students	Answers of Group 3 Students
* Listen to radio programe regularly and systematically, beginning from the Special English in VOA, gradually moving to the regular programs in VOA and BBC.	* Listen to VOA and BBC, especially the news. * Listen to news broadcast in English first, then the news in Chinese.
* Listen to various kinds of spoken English materials with various accents on tapes, such as talks, conversations, interviews, reports, speeches, discussion, announcements, plays, etc.	* Listeen to various kinks of spoken English materials.
* Listen to songs and try to understand the words and meaning.	* ---**
* Listen to course materials for listening comprehension, and do comprehension exercises.	* ---
* Watch video tapes or listen to audio tapes of feature films.	* ---
* Give oneself listening tests (e.g. the TOEFL tests).	* Listen to short stories on tape and take dictation from them.

** The --- indicates a specific technique reported by the Group 3 students which is similar to the one presented in the same line in the left hand column. Techniques like this may be similar to the corresponding one in the left hand column in general but not in specificity.

* Have some intensive listening (listn to a small piece repeatedly until understand everything), consult the dictionary or ask the others when there are difficulties.

* Have extensive listening, try to get the general meaning by first listening rather than the words.

* Try to guess the general meanings from the context when listening.

* Go to lectures or talks given by native speakers.

* Have face-to-face conversations with native speakers.

* Pay attention to the changes of stress and intonation used by native speakers, and guess the the meaning conveyed by these changes.

* Pay attention to the characteristics of the major dialects of English, and try to get used to them through listening.

* Read newspapers and news bulletins to enlarge the knowledge of the world, and to learn new vocabulary items and expressions.

* Read novels, stories and magazines. The improvement of listening comprehension goes hand in hand with that of reading comprehension, writing and speaking.

* Have intensive listening.

* Listen to lessons given by native speakers attentively

* Listen to and do sound discrimination exercises.

* When listening to talks by native speakers, try to be patient and tolerant if there are difficulties.

* Practise reading aloud to improve pronunciation. Accuracy in pronunciation is the prerequisite of listening comprehension.

* Enhance the knowledge of the English Grammar.

* Do more reading after class to increase vocabulary.

B. Question 2: What strategies or techniques have helped you most in improving your English speaking abilities?

Answers of Group 1 Students	Answers of Group 3 Students
* Practise reading aloud to improve pronunciation and intonation.	* ---
* Memorize and recite situational conversations.	* ---

* Memorize useful and colloquial expressions and idioms.	* ---
* Try to use these expressions and idioms in a meaningful way.	* Answer teacher's questions in class.
	* Listen to and do pattern drills.
* Listen to tapes and repeat.	* ---
* Listen to or read short stories, then try to retell them in one's own words.	* Read aloud and record it on tapes, then listen to it critically.
* Recite or rehearse texts or stories loudly and emotionally.	
* Imitate sub-vocally when listening to native speakers.	* ---
* Talk with other students or teachers, do not be afraid of making mistakes.	* ---
* Find a partner and practise speaking English with him/her regularly.	* ---
* Have after-class oral group activities such as free conversations, or debates on topics of interest.	* Participate in after-class oral activities such as English evenings.
* Make a short talk based on the text, either to the other students or to oneself, try to use the newly learned vocabulary items and expressions as much as possible.	
* Have imaginary conversation with oneself, or think aloud about things happening around.	
* Try to think in English.	* ---
* Look for chances to speak to native speakers.	* ---
* Establish personal contact with native speakers, have sports or other recreational activities with them, e.g. outgoings, parties, picnics, etc.	
* Do oral or written translation when reading newspaper or stories.	

* Read spoken English materials, write down the useful expressions in a notebook.

* Read contemporary novels.

* Pay attention to the difference between the spoken and written forms in English, avoid sounding bookish when speaking.

* Keep diaries. Write in simple spoken form.

4.2 Results of Questionnaire Part III

Part III consisted of three questions concerning the use of techniques in three different learning situations. The answers were combined into several broader categories. The results were tabulated for use in analyses (see Table 2).

4.2.1 Results of Question 1

Considering the results for the whole sample, it can be seen that writing an outline in English and then practising is the most frequent technique in preparing an oral speech/report. Writing down the speech in English and memorizing it, organizing it mentally in English and then practising, or just thinking of an outline in English also appeared to be fairly common techniques in tackling such learning tasks. Translating from Chinese to English when preparing the speech was the least used technique according to these students' report.

When comparing the answers of Group 1 students with those of the Group 3 students, one can find that the unsuccessful students seemed to rely heavily on memorizing a previously-written passage,

probably because of lack of self-confidence or feeling unsecured. The successful students, on the other hand, appeared to take a more active and creating approach in preparing their speech, by consciously planning and then practising. Such practice involves a lot of thinking in English and expressing the thoughts flexibly and naturally, which resembles the ways in which people use language in real life.

4.2.2 Results of Question 2

In the learning of new vocabulary items, the most commonly used technique reported by all students was making vocabulary lists with an explanation or synonyms beside each word. They were later used as graphic support for memorization. Memorization appeared to be the second most common technique. Forty-two students (72%) of the whole sample reported regularly repeating aloud or writing the words down to help with memorization. More than half (53%) of the whole sample answered that they often made conscious associations with other words similar in sound, spelling or meaning.

Looking up words in a dictionary for examples and collocation, and making sentences using the words were also frequent techniques in learning new words. In addition, over half of the students reported that they consciously tried to use the new words as much as possible in speech and writing. Doing substitution drills and taking dictation appeared to be the least used techniques.

It can be seen that more successful students reported making sentences (Technique No. 3) and making association (Technique No. 7) than the unsuccessful ones. As for the answers concerning the other techniques, they are similar in the three different groups.

B.

Question 2: When learning new words, which of the following techniques do you generally use? (check any that apply)

Answer	Group 1 (20)	Group 2 (18)	Group 3 (20)	Total (58)
1. Make vocabulary lists with explanations in English/ Chinese beside each word.	15	10	18	43
2. Write the words down or repeat them orally to help with memorization.	13	13	16	42
3. Make sentences using the new words.	11	9	6	26
4. Do substution drills.	3	1	2	6
5. Look up in a dictionary for examples and collocations.	11	12	12	35
6. Try to use them in speech or writing.	13	6	11	30
7. Take dictation.	1	0	0	1
8. Associate them to other words which are similar in sound, spelling or meaning.	13	13	5	31

C.

Question 3: In learning new grammatical structures (e.g. tenses, voice, sentence patterns), which of the following techniques do you use? (check any that apply)

Answer	Group 1 (20)	Group 2 (18)	Group 3 (20)	Total (58)
1. Write them down or repeat them aloud to help memorize.	15	12	14	41
2. Make sentences using the new structures.	13	12	15	40
3. Study grammar books or dictionaries.	17	13	17	47
4. Use them in speech or writing.	13	9	12	34
5. Do pattern drills.	8	6	6	20
6. Associate them to other grammatical structures.[1]	2	0	1	3

It is notable that for Question 3 (learning grammatical structures), the numbers of students who reported using those techniques are very close in all the three groups.

4.3 Scoring and Results of the Criterion Measure

In the present study, success was defined in terms of performance in the oral test. In order to identify successful and unsuccessful learners, we divided the subjects into the following three groups based on their oral test scores:

Group 1 -- the top group

Group 2 -- the middle group

Group 3 -- the bottom group

Group 1 comprised the 20 highest scorers, Group 3 the 20 lowest scorers The remaining 18 students were put into Group 2.[2]

A t-test was done to compare the group means. The results can be found in Table 3. It can be seen that the differences between Group 1 and Group 3, and between Group 2 and Group 3 are both significant. In other words, the Group 1 and Group 2 students were better than the Group 3 students in oral communicative abilities at a statistically significant level.

Table 3 T-Test: Comparison of Group Means in the Oral Test

	Number	Mean	S.D.	T-value
Group 1	20	32.10	2.57	
Group 3	20	21.45	2.95	12.18***
Group 2	18	26.61	1.09	
Group 3	20	21.45	2.95	7.30***

* $P < .05$ ** $P < .01$ *** $P < .001$

4.4 Scoring and Results of Questionnaire Part II

4.4.1 Use of Strategies and Techniques

The questionnaires were collected, and the responses were assigned values of 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively (5 indicating the highest frequency of use, 1 the lowest frequency of use). Then scores were added to form totals for each of the three strategies examined. The means and standard deviations appear in Table 4.

Table 4 Means and Standard Deviations of the Strategies

Strategy	Mean	S.D.
Formal Practice	33.97	5.25
Functional Practice	34.31	6.79
Monitoring	6.74	1.36

However, it was noted that the learning techniques examined by the questionnaire, especially those concerning formal practice and functional practice, are highly individual. Certain valuable information might be lost by just looking at the total scores. Therefore it was considered highly desirable to group the techniques examined in the questionnaire, particularly those related to oral practice, into sub-categories under formal oral practice and functional oral practice, and to calculate scores separately for each of them.

Techniques characteristic of formal oral practice were grouped into four sub-categories:

1) memorization (memorizing texts and other language materials),
2) drilling (listening to and doing pattern drills),
3) imitating (imitating and repeating while listening), and
4) retelling (retelling stories).

Techniques characteristic of functional oral practice, on the other hand, were categorized into the four following sub-groups:

1) speaking with other students, teachers, and native speakers,
2) thinking in English,
3) activeness in group oral communicative activities, and
4) attending lectures, watching TV and films in English.

In addition to the classifications described above, all techniques related to formal and functional practice were further categorized in terms of listening, speaking and reading.[3] Thus techniques under each of these three categories would include those characteristic of formal and functional practice. The purpose of such categorization was to see how practice in these three skills affect improvement in oral productive proficiency.

The classifications of learning techniques described above are in some ways overlapping. However it was hoped that by such classifications, some patterns might emerge in the statistical analyses.

The means and standard deviations for the sub-categories described above are presented in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5 Means and Standard Deviations of Sub-categories of Formal and Functional Oral Practice

	Variable	Means	S.D.
Formal Oral Practice	Memorization	6.14	1.75
	Drilling	3.40	1.04
	Imitating	6.05	1.48
	Story Re-telling	2.84	1.10
Functional Oral Practice	Speaking with Other Students, Teachers, and Native Speakers	9.16	2.20
	Thinking in English	3.47	0.90
	Activeness in Group Oral Communicative Activities	3.07	1.06
	Attending Lectures, Watching TV and Films	7.67	1.32

Table 6 Means and Standard Deviations of Practice in Listening, Speaking and Reading

Variable	Means	S.D.
Listening	7.31	1.66
Speaking	25.59	4.45
Reading	7.59	1.50

4.4.2 Comparison of Group Differences

T-tests were performed to compare the means of the reported use of the strategies and techniques of the three groups. The results can be found in Tables 7 and 8.

Of the three learning strategies, only functional practice showed statistically significant difference among the three groups. This means that students who were more successful in oral communication employed functional practice strategy more frequently than the less successful ones. This finding is further supported by results on the sub-categories of techniques related to functional practice, which indicate that differences between Group 1 (highest) and Group 3 (lowest) were highly significant in 1) speaking with other students, teachers and native speakers, 2) thinking in English, and 3) activeness in group oral communicative activities. Significant differences were also found between Group 2 and Group 3 in 1) speaking with other students, teachers and native speakers, and 2) thinking in English.

In contrast, no statistically significant difference was found among any of the three groups when formal practice as a general strategy or the specific techniques were examined.

Considering the results in Table 8, it can be seen that both Group 1 and Group 2 were significantly different from Group 3 in practice in speaking. Difference in practice in reading between Group 1 and Group 3 was also significant.

Table 7 T-test: Group Difference in Use of Strategies and Techniques

	Variable	Group	Mean	t Value	Group	Mean	t Value
Strategy	Formal Practice	1	34.60		2	34.56	
		3	32.80	1.06	3	32.80	1.22
	Functional Practice	1	35.80		2	35.28	
		3	31.95	1.66*	3	31.95	2.20*
	Monitoring	1	6.65		2	6.56	
		3	7.00	-0.80	3	7.00	-1.01
Formal Oral Practice	Memorization	1	6.10		2	6.00	
		3	6.30	-0.38	3	6.30	-0.54
	Drilling	1	3.45		2	3.33	
		3	3.40	0.14	3	3.40	-0.21
	Imitating	1	5.90		2	6.50	
		3	5.80	0.23	3	5.80	1.40
	Retelling	1	3.05		2	3.00	
		3	2.50	1.52	3	2.50	1.44
Functional Oral Practice	Speak-ing with Other Students, Teachers and Native Speakers	1	9.90		2	9.94	
		3	7.70	3.41***	3	7.70	4.04***
	Thinking in English	1	4.00		2	3.44	
		3	2.95	4.27**	3	2.95	2.25*
	Activeness in Group Oral Communicative Activities	1	3.65		2	2.94	
		3	2.60	3.54***	3	2.60	1.17
	Attending Lectures, Watching TV and Films	1	7.75		2	7.72	
		3	7.55	0.46	3	7.55	0.43

Group 1 (high) : 20 students
Group 2 (middle) : 18 students
Group 3 (low) : 20 students

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

Table 8 T-Test: Group Difference in Practice in Listening, Speaking and Reading

Variable	Group	Mean	T Value	Group	Mean	T Value
Listening	1	7.40		2	7.33	
	3	7.20	0.36	3	7.20	0.25
Speaking	1	26.70		2	26.78	
	3	23.40	2.41**	3	23.40	2.77**
Reading	1	8.20		2	7.67	
	3	6.90	2.78**	3	6.90	1.77

Group 1 (high) : 20 students
Group 2 (middle) : 18 students
Group 3 (low) : 20 students

* p< .05
** p< .01
*** p< .001

4.4.3 Effects on Achievement

In order to assess the effects of the three strategies and the techniques characteristic of them on oral proficiency, and to identify which variables were predictive of success, multiple repression analyses were performed, using factors in each category as the predicative variables. The results of the analyses are presented in Tables 9, 10, 11 and 12.

Multiple Regression I:

Results in Table 9 indicate that of the three learning strategies, functional practice is the major predictor of success. It yields a multiple R of .326 at Step 1, with R^2 = .106. None of the other two strategies makes an additional significant contribution.

Multiple Regression II:

It is notable that, none of the four techniques characteristic of formal oral practice can be used as a significant predictor of

success in oral communication. The results in Table 10 show that the four sub-categories of formal oral practice, when operating jointly as a group, can account for only 3.6% of the variation in achievement.

Multiple Regression III:

Results in Table 11 show that the sub-categories of functional oral practice play important roles in predicting success. Thinking in English initially yields a multiple R of .49, with a R^2 of .24. Speaking with other students, teachers and native speakers raises the multiple R to .59, with R^2 = .35. This indicates that these two sub-categories of functional oral practice are powerful predictors of success in oral communication. In fact, the variable "thinking in English" stands out as the most powerful predictor among all the variables under consideration.

Activiness in group oral communicative activities did not make a statistically significant contribution to the R Square change, probably due to its redundancy with thinking in English and speaking with other students, teachers and native speakers. In a simple regression analysis in which each strategy and technique was examined as an individual predictive variable (see Appendix, Table 15), activeness in group oral communicative activities yielded a simple R of .46, with a R^2 = .21. This indicates that this technique has a strong effect on achievement, and can be used as an individual significant predictor of success. However, it has much weaker explanatory power when operating jointly with the other two techniques, because these three techniques are very similar in nature. Its redundancy with the other two techniques is illustrated by the results of the intercorrelation analysis (see Appendix, Table 16).

Attending lectures and watching TV and films showed little effect on achievement, as can be seen from the results of the multiple or simple regression analysis.

Multiple Regression IV:

Considering the results in Table 12, it can be found that practice in reading stands out as the strongest and significant predictor of oral proficiency. It yields a multiple R of .43 at Step 1, with a R^2 = .188. Practice in speaking makes an additional contribution to the increase in multiple R, raising it to .455, with a R^2 =.207. The increase in R^2 is not statistically significant, probably due to its redundancy with reading practice. In the simple regression analysis (see Appendix, Table 15), practice in speaking has a simple R of .33, R^2= .11, which is statistically significant, but somewhat lower than that of practice in reading. The intercorrelation analysis also shows that these two variables correlate at a highly significant level (see Appendix, Table 16).

Table 9 Multiple Regression I: Learning Strategies

Variable	Multiple R	R Square	RSQ Change	Beta	F
Functional Practice	0.326	0.106	0.106	0.320	6.232*
Monitoring	0.350	0.123	0.016	-0.135	1.033
Formal Practice	0.357	0.127	0.005	-0.087	0.282

* $p < .05$

Table 10 Multiple Regression II: Learning Techniques Characteristic of Formal Oral Practice

Variable	Multiple R	R Square	RSQ Change	Beta	F
Re-telling	0.150	0.023	0.023	0.035	0.022
Memorization	0.163	0.027	0.004	-0.083	0.300
Imitating	0.168	0.028	0.0015	-0.157	0.575
Drilling	0.188	0.036	0.008	-0.134	0.424

Table 11 Multiple Regression III: Learning Techniques Characteristic of Functional Oral Practice

Variable	Multiple R	R Square	RSQ Change	Beta	F
Thinking in English	0.492	0.242	0.242	0.339	6.702*
Speaking with Other Students Teachers and Native Speakers	0.592	0.350	0.108	0.294	5.395*
Activeness in Group Oral Communication Activities	0.602	0.362	0.012	0.179	1.543
Attending Lectures, Watching TV and Films	0.614	0.378	0.015	-0.133	1.283

* $p < .05$

Table 12 Multiple Regression IV: Practice in Speaking, Listening, and Reading

Variable	Multiple R	R Square	RSQ Change	Beta	F
Reading	0.433	0.188	0.188	0.350	6.607*
Speaking	0.455	0.207	0.020	0.242	2.329
Listening	0.471	0.222	0.015	-0.145	1.027

* $p < .05$

4.5 Results of Interview

As described in 2.2, the interview was composed of six parts, and was conducted in Chinese. The transcripts and notes of the nineteen interviews were analyzed and translated into English. The results will be presented separately for each part, with a comparison between the answers provided by the top and bottom groups. For convenience, the ten interviewees who scored the highest in the oral test will be referred to as Group 1 students, and the nine lowest scorers as Group 3 students.

4.5.1 Personal Interest or Preference for Modality in Language Learning

Question 1. The interviewees were first asked whether they were interested in or preferred a particular modality in EFL learning. The answers can be seen in Table 13.

Table 13 Personal Interest or Preference in EFL Learning

Answer	Group 1 student(10)	Group 3 student(9)
Interested in or preferred the oral modality	3	4
Interested in or preferred the written modality	4	4
Interested in both modalities	1	1
More interested in oral at early stages, but written at later stages	2	0

The reasons for these answers are presented by group.

Group 1: The three students who were more interested in the oral modality said that they had had no training in this modality in their English learning in secondary school. Once they entered college they immediately became fascinated with learning to speak and understand the foreign language. They also believed that students in a foreign language institute should be strong in oral skills.

The four who were more interested in the written modality regarded reading ability as being "essential and f-undamental" for the overall proficiency in English. As one put it:

> Oral practice can help improve your fluency and accuracy, but it alone won't get you far. You've got to read a lot in order to enlarge your vocabulary and increase the knowledge of the world, and to build up the 'sense of the language'.

One of them also said that he had difficulty in pronunciation and intonation, and often felt embarrassed when speaking in the class. So he spent more time in reading and writing and enjoyed it

The two who preferred the oral modality at early stages but written at later stages shared the opinions described above, but stressed that there should be a focus on a particular modality at different learning stages.

Although the ten students differed in their preference for a particular modality, they generally showed a very high personal interest in EFL learning, and had a strong desire to attain a high level of EFL proficiency.

Group 3: Of the four students who preferred the oral modality in EFL learning, two said it was out of interest. One believed that oral skills were more important than written skills for future work, and one regarded spoken English as being relatively easier to learn.

As for the four who preferred the written modality, three gave personality reasons -- they liked to be left alone and read quietly. The other student said he was very interested in translation.

Question 2 The students were then asked to give self-evaluation of their achievements in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in English at college, and put them in rank order if possible.

Of the nineteen interviewees, eight (three in Group 1, five in Group 3) had most success in listening, seven (five in Group 1, two in Group 3) in reading, and four (two in Group 1, two in Group 3) in speaking. Achievements in listening, speaking and reading were frequently mentioned as the second in rank.

It is notable that only one student in Group 1 but four in Group 3 felt that they made the least success in speaking as compared with other skills. Writing was generally considered to be the last in rank order in terms of success achieved (nine in Group 1, five in Group 3).

4.5.2 Attitude and Motivation

Question 3 To examine the relationship between learning strategies and motivation, the investigator asked the interviewees if, in retrospect, they attributed their success/failure to their strong/the lack of motivation to learn English.

Group 1: Most of the Group 1 students (nine) regarded themselves as being "highly motivated" or "very interested" in learning English, with three particularly interested in oral skills. Three of them were planning to apply for MA courses in English literature or applied linguistics. Two expressed their desire to be "a diplomat" or "an interpreter working in the U.N." Three mentioned that they were very interested in Western cultures and the ways of living and thinking of the English speaking people.

As a result of being highly motivated, most of them worked "very hard" or "harder than many other students" in their class.

Two students said that, in addition to their interest in learning a foreign language, another reason for working so hard was that they did not want to go back to work in their home district where English was of little use.[4]

Group 3: The motivation reported by the Group 3 students was generally lower than that of the Group 1 students. Only one student regarded himself as being "highly motivated." Three mentioned that they had been "quite highly motivated" at the early learning stage, but their interest and motivation gradually declined at later stages, because of lack of self-confidence caused by continuous setbacks in their studies.

Two students explained that they were "not very hard-working" partly because they felt "pretty secure" once they had entered college. "You'll be given a job anyway."

It is worth noting that out of the nine Group 3 students, four reported that learning English at college was not their original choice. They all had the experience of failing once in the national higher education entrance examinations for science students, and then shifted their focus to learning English. They succeeded in the examinations for arts students in the second year and became English majors in this institute.

4.5.3 Conscious vs. Unconscious Learning

Questions in this part were concerned with the difference between rational and intuitive learning, and were adopted from Naiman et al's study (1978, 11).[5]

Question 4 In this question, the interviewees were presented with the following statements, and were asked which of them represented their point of view.

> Some people say you cannot make a conscious effort in learning a foreign language. They hate to study grammar; they say you must simply allow the language to sink in gradually.
> Others argue that language learning is a conscious and systematic process. You set about it by studying, by constantly asking for explanations and rules. In short by actively thinking about it.

All the ten Group 1 students and four Group 3 students (73% of the total) considered their language learning either a highly conscious and systematic process (five Group 1 students and two Group 3 students) or one which comprised both conscious and unconscious elements (five Group 1 students and two Group 3 students). It is notable that more than

half of the Group 3 students (five) regarded their learning as an unconscious process.

Question 5 Then the students were asked to comment on those statements using their own learning experiences as examples.

Group 1: All the ten students pointed out that conscious and systematic learning was inevitable and desirable, especially in a formal foreign language learning setting like the one they had. They stressed that, in addition to absorbing a lot through reading and listening, one needed to know how and why in order to be able to use the language effectively and accurately. Two of them commented that the choice between conscious and unconscious learning depended on the learning environment and the learner's age.

Group 3: Several Group 3 students (four) replied that they "hated" or considered it "unnecessary" to study grammar. They believed that more reading and listening would help to build up "the sense of the language," which was regarded as being essential in foreign language learning.

4.5.4 Memorization

Since memorization is generally regarded as one of the important and effective ways for learning in the Chinese tradition, it is of interest to inquire about the students' perception of the role of memorization in foreign language learning.

Question 6 The students were first asked to self-evaluate their ability to use their memory in English learning as compared with the rest of their class.

Group 1: Of the ten students, four stated that they had an "excellent" memory, four felt their memory for learning English was

"good," and two considered their memory as being "average."

Group 3: Three students reported that their memory for English learning was "good," three "quite good," and one "average." The other three students said their memory was "poor."

Question 7 Then they were asked about their perception of the role of memorization in learning a foreigr language.

Group 1: Five students in this group believed that having a good memory and memorization was "very" or "highly important" in foreign language learning. Four regarded memorization as an "important but not the most important technique." All of them stressed that memorization was important particularly for learning vocabulary items and grammatical structures, which were generally considered to be "fundamental for improvement in overall language proficiency," especially at the intermediate and advanced stages. Seven of them also pointed out that memorization alone was inadequate: "it should be based on extensive reading and listening."

Three of them mentioned that memorization of texts and dialogues helped to improve their spoken English at the early stage, while two said memorization of specific terms and expressions was extremely helpful in their interpretation lessons at the advanced stage.

Only one student said that he did not think much about the role of memorization, because his memory was so good that "things stay in my mind without making much obvious effort."

Group 3: Five students regarded memorization as "very important" in foreign language learning; three "important but not the key point," and one "relatively important, but not as important as reading comprehension." They all agreed that memorization was an

effective way to enlarge their English vocabulary, which was regarded as a prerequisite for successful learning. Three also mentioned that memorization was "highly important" for "doing well in examinations."

The four students who had an "average" or "poor" memory complained that though they had tried hard to keep up with the others, their "poor memory" greatly hindered their English learning. Three other students felt that they made "little achievement" at the advanced stage, partly because their vocabulary was "too small."

One student (the lowest scorer in the oral test) said if one had a good memory, then "you needn't read so much."

Question 8 The investigator also asked them about their specific techniques for memorizing.

Group 1: Again, the students in this group produced more specific descriptions. Five of them stated that they never forced themselves to use rote memory. Four students reported that they need cyclical memorization. One of them described it in this way:

> You can memorize up to 50 or more words a day, but if you don't try again later, you may forget most of them in a few days. What you need is to memorize again in the third day, and once more a week later. Once you've cried 3 times, they just stay in your mind. To me, 3 times are critical.

Five students indicated that they made associations when memorizing. Three felt memorizing words or sentences in situation or context very effective.

Nearly all of the Group 1 students (eight) mentioned that they read texts or sentences aloud in the morning in order to memorize them at the early stage. Two said they liked to make sentences using the new words, because it helped them to memorize the words in a

meaningful way. Another two students reported that reading a lot naturally deepened memory, particularly words that came up frequently in their reading.

Group 3: As for the students in this group, three mentioned using association when memorizing. Two found making sentences an effective way to help with memorization. Again most of them practised reading aloud in the morning at the early stage in order to memorize their texts or articles they read elsewhere.

One student stated that she often asked the successful students for tricks to help with memorization, but found that those "tricks" were not really useful to her.

Another student realized that her memory was "poor," so she deliberately tried to read more, with the hope that this would make up for the loss caused by her poor memory.

4.5.5 Dependence/Independence in EFL Learning

Question 9 To discover the extent to which the students preferred to be guided by the teacher or a course, or to be left alone and learn the language in their own ways, the students were asked to indicate the degree of their dependence/independence in EFL learning at the early, intermediate and advanced stages. Their answers can be seen in Table 14.

It can be seen that even at the early stage, the successful students showed a higher degree of independence in EFL learning than the unsuccessful ones. Though both groups of students reported an increase in their independence at the later stages, the successful students appeared to be far more independent in their EFL learning process than the latter.

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Table 14 Dependence/Independence in EFL Learning

A. Group 1 Students (10)

Degree of Dependence/Independence	Early Stage	Intermediate Stage	Advanced Stage
1. Always firmly guided by the teacher or courses	0	0	0
2. Mainly guided by the teacher or courses	3	0	0
3. Partly guided by the teacher and partly left to your own devices and learn the language in your own way	5	2	1
4. Mainly left to your own devices and learn the language in your own way	2	8	1
5. Completely left to your own devices and learn the language in your own way	0	0	8

B. Group 3 Students (9)

Degree of Dependence/Independence	Early Stage	Intermediate Stage	Advanced Stage
1. Always firmly guided by the teacher or courses	2	1	0
2. Mainly guided by the teacher or courses	4	0	0
3. Partly guided by the teacher or courses and partly left to your own devices and learn the language in your own way	3	6	2
4. Mainly left to your own devices and learn the language in your own way	0	2	7
5. Completely left to your own devices and learn the language in your own way	0	0	0

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4.5.6 The Role of Learning Strategies and Techniques

Question 10 In order to obtain more personal insights of the students about their learning strategies and techniques, the investigator asked them to comment on the role of learning strategies and techniques in language learning, and their own specific techniques which they might have developed.

Grroup 1: Four students considered that developing appropriate and effective learning techniques was critical in foreign language learning, and "more important than the teachers and language learning environment." They stressed that the lack of appropriate and effective techniques usually led to unsuccessful learning.

Most of them (8) reported that they were aware of their own learning techniques and habits, and constantly adjusted them for new learning tasks at different learning stages.

Four commented that learning techniques were highly individual, and were closely related to one's language level and learning experiences, personality characteristics as well as physical conditions. Two of them remembered that they had constantly observed how the other students (both the most successful and the less successful ones) approached their learning tasks. Such observation enlighted them on the importance of learning techniques and habits, and helped to develop their own.

Three stressed the important role of planning one's studies and being purposeful in every learning task. One of them, who was commonly recognized as the most successful student in their grade, stated that beside the routine courses and texts, he always had his own plan for "self study," and had focus on certain particular aspects for each learning stage. "I know what I must do next, and

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try to make the best of my time. Once it is done, I go to the sports-ground and play."

Group 3: As for students in this group, only one mentioned the importance of learning techniques. Three felt that their learning techniques were "not effective or flexible enough." Another student said her learning techniques were "better than before." Only one replied that his learning tehniques were "satisfactory and effective."

Another student said that since he hated grammar and mechanical practice, he "always looked for tricks or short cuts" in his studies, and established techniques and habits suitable to his interest and characteristics. He also commented that though he was pleased with his oral abilities now, his vocabulary was "too small" and his "foundation" not "solid."

It may be significant that three students in Group 3 replied that they seldom thought about learning techniques, but just "did what is natural." As a result, they had little to say on this issue.

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Notes

1. This technique was not originally listed in the questionnaire. It was added by 3 students when answering the question "Other techniques -- please specify." (see Appendix I)

2. The original number of students for Group 2 was twenty. Two students belonging to this group did not complete the questionnaire, and were therefore excluded from the present analysis.

3. Classification of learning strategies in terms of language modality was discussed by Bialystok in her article "The Role of Conscious Strategies in Second Language Proficiency," 1979. For further discussion of this issue, see D.R.Olson, "From Utterance to Text: the Bias of Language in Speech and Writing," Harvard Educational Review , 47, 1977, p.257-80.

4. In China, university graduates are generally assigned to their jobs by the government. A certain number of them are sent back to their home town or district to help improve the local conditions. The most successful students are usually given the privilege of choosing their job, or of being picked up by important institutions or departments in the government with their personal agreement. Some of them go on with higher degree studies.

5. The choice between rational and intuitive learning was considered by Stern as one of the dilemmas in language learning. For discussion of this issue, see H.H. Stern, 1975. This issue has been examined by Naimen et al. in their study The Good Language Learner , 1978.

6. For discussion of the Chinese traditional concepts of learning and their influence on EFL teaching and learning in China, see Yu Zheng-zhong, 1983.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Interpretation

The questionnaire and interview findings produced a large number of specific techniques employed by the successful students. The statistical results provided evidence that certain strategies and techniques as examined in Questionnaire Part II are facilitative to EFL learning. All this demonstrated the feasibility and necessity of conducting such type of research.

This chapter consists of five sections:

1. Discussion of results in Questionnaire Parts I and III,
2. Discussion of statistical findings in Questionnaire Part II,
3. Discussion of interview findings
4. Strategies and techniques identified in the study
5. Discussion of research instruments

5.1. Discussion of the Results in Questionnaire Parts I and III

5.1.1 Learning Techniques Identified from Questionnaires

The answers in Questionnaire Parts I (see 4.1) and III (see 4.2) yielded a large number of specific techniques employed by the successful Chinese EFL learners in the following learning situations: 1) learning to understand the spoken language, 2) learning to speak, 3) learning vocabulary, and 4) learning grammatical structures.

These learning techniques confirm several of the learning strategies proposed in the Rubin-Stern inventories. While the specific learning techniques are presented below, the strategies

which are derived from these techniques will be discussed in a following section in combination with those identified from the interview findings.

It should be pointed out that, firstly, the specific techniques listed below are not necessarily applicable to all successful students, since foreign language learning is highly individual. Secondly, though these techniques are believed to be characteristic of successful learning, they are by no means exclusively employed by the most successful learners.

5.1.1.1. Techniques for Learning to Understand the Spoken Language

The following techniques were reported by the successful students (Group 1) as the most helpful in improving their listening comprehension abilities.

1) listening to radio broadcasts, especially the news
2) listening to various types of listening materials on tape
3) watching films and video tape programs
4) listening to and doing comprehension exercises
5) giving oneself listening comprehension tests
6) attending lectures and talks given by native speakers
7) having face-to-face interactions with native speakers
8) trying to get general or specific information when listening the first time
9) guessing the meaning by using contextual clues
10) paying attention to specific features such as stress and intonation, and the meaning conveyed by them
11) listening to different dialects and paying attention to their major characteristics
12) reading a lot in order to learn the related vocabulary items and expressions.

5.1.1.2. Techniques for Learning to Speak

Techniques used to help improve oral production abilities by the successful students are listed below.

1) talking with other students and teachers as often as possible

2) looking for opportunities to talk with native speakers
3) not being afraid of making mistakes
4) participating actively in after-class oral activities
5) having imaginery conversations with oneself or thinking aloud
6) thinking in English as often as possible
7) making a short talk on text, trying to use the newly learned vocabulary items and structures
8) listening, imitating and repeating a lot
9) reciting or rehearsing texts or stories loudly and emotionally
10) listening to and re-telling stories
11) doing oral translation when reading newspaper or stories
12) memorizing situational conversations
13) memorizing useful expressions and idioms
14) trying to use these expressions in a meaningful way
15) reading contemporary novels, paying particular attention to conversations in them
16) paying attention to differences between the spoken form and the written form, avoiding to sound like a book when speaking

5.1.1.3. Techniques for Learning Vocabulary

The following techniques were generally used by the successful students for learning vocabulary items.

1) making vocabulary lists with explanations in English or Chinese beside each word
2) writing the words down or repeating them aloud to help with memorization
3) looking up words in a dictionary for their meaning and usage
4) associating the new words with other words similar in spelling, sound or meaning
5) trying to use the newly-learned words in speech or writing as often as possible
6) making sentences using the new words
7) doing substitutional skills
8) reading and listening a lot after class
9) reading aloud to practice pronunciation

5.1.1.4. Techniques for Learning Grammatical Structures

While learning new grammatical structures, the following techniques were often used by the successful students.

1) studying grammar books
2) looking up the structures in a dictionary for their meaning, collocation and examples
3) writing the structures down or repeating them aloud to help with memorization
4) memorizing or/and reciting sentences and texts which contain the grammatical structures
5) making sentences using the new structures

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6) listening to and doing pattern drills
7) using the structures in speech or writing as often as possible
8) listening, repeating and imitating
9) listening to stories and retelling them
10) associating the newly-learned structures with other grammatical structures

5.1.2. Major Differences between Successful and Unsuccessful Students

The results of Questionnarie Part I (see 4.1) and Part III (see 4.2) reveal differences between the most successful students (Group 1)and the least successful students (Group 3) in the following areas: 1) the diversity of specific techniques for aural and oral practice reported by per individual, 2)specificity in describing one's own ways of approaching the learning tasks, and 3) emphasis on formal/functional practice.

Although both groups of students reported participation in more or less the same types of listening activities (see Table 1a), the successful students tended to be more purposeful and insightful about their learning tasks, and seemed to employ a wider variety of techniques in those activities. Several of them drew a distinction between formal and functional practice in listening activities, and stressed that the use of techniques varied according to the purposes of practice (e.g. trying to get general or specific information, guessing the meaning by using contextual clues vs. trying to understand and then learning the new words, paying attention to the use of stress, intonation, etc.). The unsuccessful students, on the other hand, did not seem to be conscious of such differences, or tended to focus more on the formal practice. Some of them did not seem to have their own particular learning style, and produced vague statements in their answers.

This finding suggusts that examination of the kinds of learning activities may be insufficient to differentiate successful from unsuccessful learning. To achieve the above purpose, it is desirable to explore further into the specific techniques that the learners employ when participating in the activities.

The differences discussed above become more obvious when techniques for improving oral productive skills reported by the two groups are compared (see Table 1b). It seems clear that the techniques reported by the most successful students significantly outnumber those reported by the least successful ones. Furthermore, the descriptions provided by the most successful students appear to be far more concrete and insightful, especially those concerning functional practice.

Another major difference found between the two groups of students is that the successful students seem to consciously combine the improvement of oral skills with that of reading and writing (see Table 1). Several of them reported constant practice in reading and writing (e.g. reading contemporary novels and spoken English materials, translating news or short stories, and keeping a diary in English) in order to help improve their oral skills. It appears that these successful students developed an awareness of language as a system. They believed that the improvement of a certain skill must be combined with and would be facilitated by that of other skills. Therefore they consciously developed integrative learning techniques to tackle their learning tasks.

Considering the findings in in Questionnaire Parts I and III, it appears that highly successful students 1) tend to be consciously involved in formal and functional practice in many different ways,

often with more focus on the latter; 2) are in most cases more insightful about their learning techniques; 3) seem to be more purposeful in approaching their learning tasks and consciously combine their practice in various skills.

These findings share striking similarities with those in Reiss and Wesche's studies, and therefore confirm their remarks on the characteristics of successful students (Wesche,1979; Reiss,1981).

5.1.3. Techniques Characteristic of the Foreign Language Setting

When comparing the above lists with those presented in the studies by Naiman et al. (1978:15) and Wesche (1979:423), one can see that though they differ in the number of techniques specified and the ways they were described, they are in many cases more or less the same in nature.

However, a certain number of techniques appear to be closely related to or characteristic of foreign language settings as in China. Some of them seem to be heavily influenced by the Chinese traditional ideas about education which emphasized accuracy and memorization.[1]

Take making vocabulary lists as an example. According to the students' reports, this technique is most commonly used for learning vocabulary (see Table 2b). This is probably due to the deep-rooted belief in China that one of the best ways to learn a foreign language is through the "intensive" study of short texts in which all the new vocabulary and grammatical items are analyzed and then practised. In addition to their "intensive reading"[2] in class, the students were also encouraged to make an explicit study of word definitions, derivatives, collocations, and sample sentences when

reading after class. This is why most of the students developed the habit of making vocabulary lists of their own.

Another commonly used technique for learning vocabulary and grammatical items is studying grammar books and dictionaries (see 4.2.2 and 4.2.3). This technique may also have a bearing on the formal foreign language learning environment, as well as on the "intensive reading" approach discussed above. Since the foreign language input is limited, students are usually expected to take the best advantage of the language materials available by studying them explicitly and thoroughly in order to have a good knowledge of the English grammatical system and the basic vocabulary. Several successful students reported that they had studied grammar systematically during their second year at college. Such learning experience helped them build up "a solid foundation" for EFL development at later stages.

Memorization was reported to be the second most commonly used technique for learning both vocabulary items and grammatical structures (see 4.2.2 and 4.2.3). This learning technique is deeply-rooted in the Chinese traditional ideas about learning, and is usually emphasized in foreign language teaching as well as in the teaching of other subjects in China. It will be discussed in detail later in this chapter in combination with the interview findings.

As for improving listening comprehension, listening to radio programs seems to be one of the most commonly used techniques. Most students reported listening regularly to V.O.A. (Voice of America) and the B.B.C. (British Broadcasting Corporation), especially the international news. The dominance of this learning technique is probably due to the foreign language setting , where radio progams

in the target language are generally the most availalble and convenient source of natural spoken language input.

Talking with other students in English is perhaps another commonly used technique which is characteristic of the foreign language learning setting. Talking to each other in a foreign language may seem to be awkward to the beginners. However, since there were only a few native speakers available on the campus, the students had to create semi-authentic or simulated-authentic situations in which they could use English in a meaningful way.

5.2. Discussion of Statistical Findings in Questionnaire Part II

The statistical results suggested that certain learning strategies and techniques were more facilitative than others for success in improving oral abilities. They also showed that strategies questionnaires could make an important contribution to the understanding of foreign language learning processes.

5.2.1. Learning Strategies and Techniques

5.2.1.1. Functional Practice

Statistical analyses show that functional practice is the most responsible strategy for success in oral communication (see 4.4.3). This finding is consistent with that obtained in Bialystok's study, thus supporting her claim about the crucial role of the strategy in language learning (1979, 390). It seems clear that general exposure to the target language in meaningful situations facilitates internalization and the development of language proficiency, at least in oral production.

The crucial role of functional practice is further demonstrated by a closer examination of the effects of the sub-categories of this strategy (see 4.3.3)

The technique which demonstrated the strongest relationship with achievement was thinking in English. This finding substantiated Stern's postulation of the importance of learning to think in the target language (1975:315). It seems evident that attempts at formulating one's thinking by using the linguisic forms of the target language are essential to internalizing and gaining an intuitive command of the language. By trying to think directly in the target language, the learner avoids interference from the mother tongue and trains himself/herself to use the target language as a separate reference system.

Speaking with other students, teachers and native speakers also proved to be critical for success in oral communication (see Table 11). This indicates that oral productive abilities can be better acquired through constant and persistent efforts in using the language for meaningful communication and social interaction with other students, teachers, and particularly native speakers.

Activeness in group oral communicative activities is also closely related to success in oral communication (see 4.4.3 and Appendix III, Table 15). Having oral communicative activities was part of the classroom methodology used in the basic English course. Such a technique was so effective that students often adopted it for after-class practice as well. Such activities provide students with more opportunities for authentic or semi-authentic communication and interaction in the target language, which are essential to their development of oral proficiency. However, this variable is highly

redundant with thinking in English and speaking with other students, teachers and native speakers, especially with the latter, since they are very similar in nature.

The reported frequency of attending lectures and watching TV and films did not show any effect on achievement (see 4.4.3). An explanation as to why this was the case may be provided by the following factors: Films and T.V. programs in English were available only on campus, and were limited in quantity and variety. Public lectures and talks by native speakers or visiting scholars were even rarer. Although the students reported attending them "very often", this did not have any significant correlation with achievement, because "very often" in fact in their institute really meant only 3 or 4 films per month or 3 or 4 lectures per term. Thus the frequency was not high enough to have any significant effect on achievement, especially when compared with the opportunities available in a second language setting. Furthermore, films were often captioned in Chinese, so the students did not have to understand the English. Therefore they did not have a significant influence on the students' performance.

Another explanation may be that attending lectures and watching TV and films are all perceptive activities, which might not directly facilitate performance on oral production, as well be discussed in a following section.

5.2.1.2. Formal Practice

The weak relationship between oral performance and formal practice as identified in this study (see 4.4.3) needs careful interpretation. Instead of concluding that formal practice is of

little effect, it may be more reasonable to suggest that, without a sufficient amount of functional practice, great amounts of formal practice alone can improve oral performance only to a very limited extent. In other words, although formal practice is important in learning and using language forms, such practice can not automatically bring about abilities to use the language for effective and successful communication. For the improvement of communicative proficiency, a great amount of functional practice is needed.

The above postulation is strengthened by the results of the t-test, which indicated that the most successful students reported more or less the same amount of formal practice as, but significantly greater amounts of functional practice, than the least successful ones (see Table 7).

This further supports the earlier finding (see 5.1.2) that the unsuccessful students seemed to focus more on formal practice when describing their techniques for improving their oral perceptive and productive abilities. By comparison, the successful students appeared to be more conscious of the difference between formal and functional practice, and employ different techniques according to the purposes of their practice.

As one of the techniques characteristic of formal practice, memorizing texts seems to have no effect on oral performance (see Table 10). One explanation for this finding may be that there was indeed no relationship between this technique and achievement in oral performance.

Another explanation might be that the construct of this variable was not adequately measured by the questionnaire, or, that

quantitative measure did not account for its effect on learning achievement. The interview findings, as will be discussed later in this chapter, indicate that memorization in language learning is a highly complex and individual variable, which involves many different specific techniques. The effects on learning achievement may be affected by the kinds of specific technique used, the ability of the individual learner to use his/her memory in language learning, as well as the extent of use of the techniques.

Considering the above factors, it is felt that the examination of the effect of memorization on achievement in this questionnaire has been oversimplified. Furthermore, a lot of valuable information might have been missed by relying solely on self-report data. For further study of this variable, more systematic and deeper investigation is called for, and self-observation and think-aloud data are needed[3].

Of othe three specific techniques related to formal oral practice, story-retelling appears to have some weak yet positive effects (not statistically significant) on oral performance (see Table 10). This technique was part of the classroom methodology at early stages, and students adopted it for after-class practice as well. This type of activity seems to create links between the language forms being practised and their potential functional meanings, and therefore may fall somewhere between the two ends of the hypothetical continuum of formal/functional practice. That this technique may take account of communicative as well as structural aspects of language may help to explain its positive effect on oral communicative proficiency.

Drilling and imitating, on the other hand, focus primarily on mechanical practice of language forms, and thus showed little effect on achievement in oral communication.

On the whole, the findings concerning the role of formal practice obtained in the present study provide supporting evidence for Bialystok' conclusion that continuous large amounts of formal practice by low achievers improve performance only to a very limited degree (1979:390). It is suggested that much more time and effort should be spent on functional practice by less successful students in order to improve their oral proficiency.

5.2.1.3. Monitoring

Monitoring as a strategy did not show any effect on achievement (see Table 9). There may be several ways to explain this finding. One possible explanation of this finding is that performance in the oral test required the maximum attention to meaning to be conveyed, rather than on the linguistic forms. In such situations, the students had to rely mainly on the intuitive or implicit knowledge acquired, because his/her performance may be impeded when too much attention was paid to accuracy at the expense of fluency. Besides, the time restriction of the oral test left the students with little time to check and modify the forms of his/her responses. Considering the above factors, monitoring as a strategy does not seem to be beneficial or appropriate for situations like this, and therefore showed no relationship with performance on oral test.

5.2.2. Practice in Speaking, Listening and Reading

The techniques characteristic of formal and functional practice were also categorized in terms of speaking, listening and reading

(see 4.4.3). The following part attempts to interpret the statistical results on the data.

5.2.2.1. Practice in Speaking

As expected, practice in speaking facilitated performance on oral production tasks (see 4.4.3, and Appendix III Table 15). It seems natural that strategies and techniques for oral practice improve oral proficiency. By engaging in formal oral practice, students can enhance their abilities to use the language forms accurately and fluently. By participating in functional oral activities, students increase their exposure to authentic or semi-authentic spoken language. They also learn and practice how to put to use their knowledge of correct usage effectively and appropriately in order to perform different acts of communication.

A voluntary increase in exposure to the spoken language and a willingness to participate in additional oral practice activities proves to be critical for improving oral proficiency, particularly for students in a formal foreign language learning setting, where the environment and facilities for improving oral skills are limited. This is further supported by the findings in Questionnaire Part I, which indicated that successful students reported more variety of techniques for improving oral productive abilities (see 4.1).

5.2.2.2. Practice in Listening

It was originally proposed that success in oral performance would also be characterized by a great amount of listening practice, for extensive exposure to natural spoken language was believed to be essential to improving oral productive skills.

However, the statistical results did not confirm the above hypothesis (see 4.4.3). One of the possible ways to explain this may be that while any of the techniques and activities for practice in listening may be directly beneficial for aural tasks, they may not directly or necessarily improve performance on oral production. Another possibility may be that the level of the listening materials the students used was not appropriate. If the materials were not just beyond their competence, they might not have been appropriate input, as pointed out by Krashen (1981:103). Or it may be the case that the quantitative measure of time spent on listening activities did not adequately reveal the effects of this variable on achievement in oral proficiency. In other words, one needs to examine further how learners approach their learning tasks. This possibility was strengthened by findings in Questionnaire Part I (see 4.1), which suggested that the successful students seemed to differ from the unsuccessful ones in how they approached the learning tasks rather than what kinds of activities they participated in.

5.2.2.3. Practice in Reading

The original hypothesis of the positive effect of extensive reading on the improvement of overall language proficiency, including oral proficiency, was confirmed by the results of the regression analyses (see Tables 12 and 15). In fact, practice in reading appears to be one of the most responsible variables for achievement in oral communication. It demonstrated that successful EFL learning is characterized by a great amount of and constant efforts in reading newspapers, magazines, novels and other natural written materials. Such extensive reading activities enable the

students to have a rich exposure to the target language in meaningful situations, which facilitates the internalization of the target language as well as knowledge learning which in turn are closely related to the improvement of oral proficiency. This finding seems to support Bialystok's remarks that general exposure to language and functional practice were critical for achievement on all tasks (1979:390).

This finding is of great significance, and suggests an important pedagogical implication, particularly when reading is generally the primary and most available sources of natural language input as in Cnina. It suggests that students be encouraged and guided to increase their exposure to the target language by reading a lot after class, even at early learning stages.

5.3. Discussion of Interview Findings

The interview findings provided further supporting evidence for the learning strategies and techniques identified from the questionnaire findings. What is more, they yielded a number of additional techniques which were not specifically identified from the previous analysis of the questionnaire findings, thus making an important contribution to the identification of learning strategies in this study.

This approach was felt productive also because it revealed a certain number of idiosyncratic patterns of behaviour which seriously affected language learning. They suggested that learning strategies and techniques form only part of language learning: language learning is also affected by motivational and personality factors. All this demonstrates the necessity of relating the study

of strategies with that of other learner factors.

Furthermore, the personal insights obtained from the interview findings are of great value, both from a theoretical or practical point of view.

5.3.1. Learning Techniques Identified from Interviews

The specific learning techniques identified from the interviews results yet not specified in the discussion of the questionnaire findings (see 5.1.1) will be presented below.

1) listening to tape recordings and transcribing them on paper
2) paying attention to oral techniques used in natural speech such as linking, contraction, pausing, etc. and then practising
3) writing a diary in a simple spoken form
4) listening to songs in English and learning to sing them
5) translating stories or news items from Chinese to English orally when reading newspapers or magazines
6) recalling the newly-learned vocabulary items when walking and spelling them in the air with fingers
7) collecting useful idioms and colloquial expressions that one comes across in reading or listening
8) categorizing the newly-learned grammatical structures in note-books according to their meaning and forms
9) carrying a pocket-dictionary around, underlying all the words one has looked up, and often checking whether one remembers them

5.3.2. Personal Interest and Motivational Factors

The interview findings confirmed the role of motivational factors on foreign language learning as postulated in many studies in this field (e.g. Gardner and Smythe, 1975). They indicated that personal interest and motivational factors affected , and in some cases, predominated the development and use of learning strategies and techniques.

First, personal interest in EFL learning was found to be closely related to achievement. In the interviews, nearly all the successful students (Group 1) expressed a high personal interest in or

fascination with EFL learning. Though they may have more interest in or perference for a particular modality in EFL learning, they all showed a strong desire to attain a high level of English language proficiency and to be able to communicate successfully with people from the English speaking countries (see 4.5.1).

The influence of personal interest on language learning can also be illustrated by the fact that nearly half of the least successful students reported that they majored in EFL at college not because of personal interest, but rather because they believed it would be a relatively easier way to obtain tertiary education (see 4.5.2). As a result, some of them did not take their learning tasks seriously, and spent more time in other things such as reading detective stories in Chinese than learning English after class.

Secondly, a strong motivation was demcnstrated to be crucial for sucess. Nearly all the most successful students reported that they were highly motivated in their EFL learning. Their persistent efforts and perseverance had been inspired and fostered by the ideas of getting a graduate degree or studying abroad, or having an ideal and challenging career after graduation (see 4.5.2).

Such high personal interest and strong motivation to learn and succeed seem to have had great effects on their development and use of learning strategies and techniques. In order to improve their language proficiency in various aspects, they looked for and sometimes deliberately employed certain techniques, and attempted to increase their learning efficiency.

Interviews with the least successful students revealed that their reported motivation to learn English was generally lower than that of the most successful ones. Some of them seemed to be

satisfied with having the opportunity for college education, and regarded it unnecessary to "work too hard." Although some of them were aware of the importance of certain learning techniques and activities, they did not employ or participate in them often enough due to a lack of motivation or interest, as they reported in the interviews (see 4.5.2).

To sum up, the interview findings indicated that the degree of motivation and personal interest infulences the development and use of learning strategies and techniques, which in turn affects learning achievement. The findings also demonstrated the necessity of integrating the study of learning strategies with that of affective factors.

5.3.3. Memorization in FL Learning in China

The findings of the present study indicate that memorization and recitation was one of the common techniques used by the students in all the 3 groups (see 4.4.2). This technique was reported to be frequently used for learning vocabulary items and grammatical structures, and also for learning to speak (see 4.1 and 4.2). Though statistical analyses did not show any of its effects on language achievement, findings in the interviews showed that the students generally regarded it as being "important" and "effective" for foreign languageg learning, particularly at early and intermediate stages (see 4.5.4).

Memorization and recitation have deep roots in the Chinese traditional ideas about education, as discussed by Yu Zhen-zhong (1983:3). In ancient Chinese schools, memorizing and reciting texts by students was considered as one of the best ways leading to real

mastery of anything. An old Chinese saying states:"When one can understand the essence of and memorize 300 Tang poems, he is sure to be able to compose poems of his own even though he is not a poet." This traditional way of teaching and learning still has prevailing influence on primary and secondary education in China nowadays. Therefore it is quite natural to find its traces in modern English teaching at college.

In addition to the influence of the traditional ideas about learning, the prevalence of memorization and recitation as a learning technique can be also attributed to the language learning environment. There is almost no natural English language environment in China. The Chinese teachers of English and a few native speakers plus a limited number of audio and video tapes and a library — these are nearly all the language input sources that the students have. In such a formal foreign language learning setting, memorizing vocabulary and grammatical items, reciting texts and situational dialogues at early stages seem to play important roles in helping the students develop their elementary oral skills. Even at intermediate stages, memorization still appears to be an effective way to help enlarge the students' English vocabulary.

It is interesting to find that several successful students stressed in the interviews that memorization alone was insufficient in language learning, and that it should be complemented by reading and listening a lot (see 4.5.4). It appears that these students had or developed an awareness of the roles of formal and functional practice in language learning, and were able to combine consciously these two kinds of practice in their learning processes.

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The nineteen interviews with the most successful and the least successful students suggest that memorization in FL learning is highly complex and individual. There are many different ways to help with memorization. The development and use of specific techniques for memorization may be affected by a number of variables including age, motivation, the past experiences of language learning and the cultural backgroud, as well as the learner's ability to use his/her memory in language learning.

5.4. Strategies and Techniques

The learning strategies and techniques identified in the present study will be presented below, using the Rubin-Stern-Naiman lists of strategies as a frame of reference. Each general strategy is composed of a number of minor ones, which are illustrated by the specific techniques reported by the successful (Group1) students.[4] It is worth noticing that although the minor strategies and specific techniques are hypothesized to be related to successful learning, they are not necesarily applicable to all successful students, due to the complexity and individuality of language learning process.

Strategy 1: Active Approach

(a) The successful students take an active approach to their learning tasks. They select learning objectives for themselves and initiate the learning process.

----Subject No. 19, 11, and 34 always had their own plans for "self-study". They consciously focused their attention on different aspects of language learning at different learning stages.

----Most of the Group 1 students reported a high level of independence from their teachers and courses in their language learning, especially at later stages.

(b) They consciously engage themselves in a number of practice activities.

----Subject No. 18 often gave himself listening comprehension tests.

----Subject No. 34 often made sentences using the newly learned vocabulary items and grammatical structures in order to master them.

----The other practice techniques were given in the lists of techniques presented in Sections 5.1.1 and 5.3.1.

(c) They consciously increase their exposure to the target language used in natural and meaningful situations.

----Nearly all the Group 1 students mentioned listening regularly to English radio broadcasts such as the B.B.C. and V.O.A. They also read a lot after class and covered a wide area of topics in reading. Eight students reported they often talked with other students and teachers in English after calss.

----The other techniques and communicative activities were given in the lists of techniques presented in 5.1.1 and 5.3.1. Several Group 1 students stressed the importance of naturally absorbing language and developing "the sense of the language" through extensive reading and listening.

(d) They are willing and active participators in both in-class and after-class oral activities.

----Subject No. 19 used to repeat subvocally when listening to the teacher or native speakers. He also paid attention to the ways in which the native speakers expressed themselves, and tried to use them in his own speech.

----Nearly all the Group 1 students reported that they "often" or "always" tried to answer the teacher's questions mentally to themselves in class.

----Seven out of 10 Group 1 students viewed their participation in group oral activities as being "active" or "very active".

(e) They consciously seek or create a better learning environment for their language learning.

----Subject No.19 and 6 established close personal relationships with the native-speaker teachers on campus and often participated in recreational activities with them.

----Subject No. 31 liked to have his radio on (English programs) when he was relaxing or doing something else. He often went to the same film or video program several times till he had understood most of it.

----Subject No. 29 and 36 developed the habit of chatting in English for about an hour after supper everyday, telling each other stories, discussing what they had learned or heard during the day or something else interesting.

----Subject No. 19 and 6 were contributing edito.s of the students' newspaper in the English Department, and played important roles on the newspaper.

(f) They are aware of their own advantages and disadvantages in language learning. They identify their individual problems in learning and actively deal with them.

----Subject No. 35 focused on improving her oral abilities in the first term. Later when she noticed that she was weak in speed reading, she spent a lot of time in reading, and constantly checked her speed and accuracy in comprehension.

Strategy 2: Formal Strategy

The successful students know how to internalize the language and how to tackle their learning tasks effectively and efficiently.

(a) They isolate certain linguistic features when learning the language, and study and analyze their usage and meaning.

----Subject No.11 used to write down the idioms and colloquial expressions that he came across in reading or listening. He would then try to use them when talking with native speakers and checked whether he had used them correctly and appropriately.

----At early stages, Subject No. 1 (a girl with very good pronunciation and intonation) paid a lot of attention to oral techniques used in natural speech such as linking, contraction, pausing etc. when listening. Then she practised by imitating and repeating till she could master them.

(b) They develop specific techniques to tackle their learning tasks.

----When listening to taped oral materials, Subject No. 11 would first concentrate on the general meaning, because "that's the normal way you do in real life." When necessary, he would then try to understand the details, or transcribe part of it in ordoer to study the new words or structures.

(c) They develop special techniques to help with memorization.

----Several students mentioned using cyclical memorization to help memorize new words and grammatical structures. Some students made associations with other words or structures which were similar in form, sound or meaning.

----Subject No. 19 categorized the newly learned grammatical structures in his notebook according to their meaning and form. "You just need to remember the 'constant' and the 'variable' when memorizing the new structures."

----Subject No. 6 used to recall the newly learned vocabulary items on his way to the classroom or dining-hall, and spelt the words in the air with his fingers. "Other students may think I'm crazy, but that's the way I do."

----The other techniques for memorization were presented in 4.5.4.

Strategy 3: Realization of Language as a System

As Naiman and his colleauges pointed out, the successful students "develop an awareness of language as a system"(1978:14).They deal with language as a system.

(a) They make inference by using contextual clues in listening and reading activities.

----Almost all the Group 1 students reported that, when coming upon an unknown word while reading after class, they usually tried to figure out the meaning by using the contextual clues.

----When listening, Subject No.34 was very conscious of the changes in intonation, stress, voicing and even the facial expressions used by the speaker, and guessed the meanings and the speaker's feelings or attitude conveyed by these features to help his comprehension.

(b) They develop an awareness of the differences between the spoken form and the written form of the language.

----Subject No. 34 paid attention to the differernces between spoken English and written English, and consciously avoided "sounding like a book when speaking."

(c) They refer back to their mother tongue at certain stages, and make cross-lingual comparisons when necessary.

----At early stages, Subject No. 11 liked to translate short stories from English to Chinese, and then back to English.

(d) They consciously combine the practice of various types of skills in learning activities.

----Subject No. 18 regarded reading contemporary novels as being a good way to improve oral skills, because "you can find a lot of natural daily conversations in the novels, very colloquial and up to date."

----Subject No. 11 kept a diary in a "simple spoken form", and felt like he was talking to himself when writing.

Strategy 4: Realization of Language as a Means of Communication and Interaction

The succesful students realize that language is a means of communication and interaction. They know that only formal practice does not automatically bring about the abilities to communicate

effectively. Therefore they seek every opportunity to use the language in real or imagined situations.

(a) They use the target language as a means of communication among themselves.

----Most of the Group 1 students often talked with their classmates in English after class. Subject No. 29, for example, talked with her partner in English after supper almost every day, and Subject No. 34 often tried to describe what had happened to his fellow students in English.

----Subject No. 18 liked to talk with his teachers. Sometimes he visited them in their families, and chatted with them in English.

(b) They seek or create opportunities to talk with native speakers.

----Subject No. 19 and 6 often went to Chinese films together with the native-speaker teachers on campus, and translated for them. After the film, they would like to discuss it with the native speakers.

----Subject No. 6 established close personal relationship with his native-speaker teacher and his family. He often had weekend outings with the family and felt that "half a day's talk with them is better than spending days practising in the lab."

(c) When using the target language for meaningful communication, they mainly focus on meaning to be conveyed rather than on form.

----Subject No. 36 and 9 paid little attention to the forms they used when talking with native speakers. They did not correct their own errors unless they caused misunderstanding.

(d) When getting stuck in responding/talking because they do not know the right word, they try to use all sorts of ways to help convey the meaning.

----Subject No. 52 and 18 often "talked around" using explanations, synonyms, paraphrases when they did not have the right word at hand when speaking with native speakers. Then they would ask the native speaker for the exact word.

----Subject No. 19 also used gestures and facial expressions to help help convey the meaning.

----Subject No. 11 tried to create new words when he did not have the right ones. "Very often the native speaker would understand what I meant, and would tell me that was not the normal way they said it."

Strategy 5: <u>Realization of Language as a Separate Reference System</u>

The succesful students train themselves to get into the habit of using the target language as a separate system.

(a) They try to attain an intuitive command of the language by learning to think in the it.

----Most of the Group 1 students reported that they constantly tried to think in English while working or studying in English. The importance of thinking in English was emphasized by Subject No. 19. "You must learn to think directly in English when speaking or writing. Translating from the mother tongue is a very bad habit. You can never learn well if you keep thinking in Chinese and translating everything to English when you speak or write."

----Most of the Group 1 students mentioned that, when preparing for an oral speech or report in class, they would try to organize it in English either orally or by writing an outline, then would practice it several times. By comparison, several Group 3 students reported that they usually wrote it down and then memorized it, or organized it in Chinese, and then put it into English.

(b) They have imaginery conversations with themselves or think aloud about things happening around.

----Subject No. 6 and 19 found they often had imaginery conversations with themselves. As Subject No. 6 put it, "I talk to myself a lot. You may think it's silly, but it's fun if you can do it naturally."

Strategy 6: Management of Affective Demands

As Naiman and his colleagues observed, the successful students realize that they must cope with the affective demands made upon them by language learning and succeed in doing so" (1978:14).

----Several students commented that one of the basic tricks for improving their oral abilities was to "talk a lot and not to be afraid of losing face when making mistakes."

----Subject No. 52 overcame his hesitation to speak in the class by putting up his hand."

----Subject No. 6 described being introvert and keeping one's mouth shut as the "biggest enemy" in learning to speak. "The less you practise speaking, the more difficult it would be, and the more mistakes you would make when you have to speak, and then you would speak even less for fear of losing your face. This would go on and on like a vicious circle. By the time you've reached the advanced stage, you wouldn't dare to say any more, otherwise you would be laughed at even by the junior students. So you've got to make a good start at the very beginning."

5.5. Discussion of Research Instruments

This study demonstrated that strategies questionnaires and interviews with students were useful and productive elicitation

techniques for the research of learning strategies and other learner characteristics, though with certain limitations.

5.5.1. Strategies Questinnaire

To assess the extent to which students use the strategies, questionnaires seem to be the most convenient and economical instrument for obtaining a large quantity of data. The main advantage of this type of instrument lies in easy administration. Two kinds of questioning format were used in the present study: 1) closed questions, and 2) open-ended questions, each of which has its own merits and demerits.

5.5.1.1. Closed Questions

Since the primary purpose of Questionnaire II was to gather quantitative information about the students' use of certain strategies, closed questions were employed. Since the responses were assigned values representing respectively the extent to which the strategies were used, they enabled simple scoring and easy data compilation.

Furthermore, this type of highly structured instrument produced precise quantitative measures of the use of strategies and techniques, which can be used for statistical evaluation of their effects on learning achievement.

However, such highly structured questioning format has its drawbacks. First, the respondents' reporting process was shaped and thus restricted by the investigator, as pointed out by Cohen (1983:6), thus the scope and type of data obtained may be limited by the investigator's conceptions of language learning process and

strategies. As a result, many aspects of the learning process were probably missed by this approach.

Another common problem of using questionnaires as a quantitative measuring instrument is that some students may tend to choose the reponses which they thought the investigator wanted to read, as discussed by Oller (1977:181). Some students may choose the responses which seemed to be characteristic of "successful learning" or "hard working". There was evidence in this study that a few students (mostly the less successful ones) tended to check the responses which did not apply to their cases, according to the observations by other students.

A third problem which was also pointed out by Oller is that

> the same question may mean different things to different people, or worse yet, different things to the same person depending on what happens to be on his mind at the moment (1977:181).

Furthermore, the findings suggested that quantitative measuring of use of strategies and techniques may not adequately reveal their effects on language learning achievement.(see 4.4.3).

5.5.1.2. Open-ended Questions

Considering the weaknesses of the closed questions as used in Questionnaire Part II and III, open-ended questions were also used in the questionnaire to complement the highly structured format.(see Appendix I, Questionnaire Part I) These questions were presented on the basis of hypothetical learning situations, and the students were asked to list and describe the learning techniques which had helped them most. This flexible questioning format proved to be useful and

productive in revealing individual learning styles as well as common learning experiences and characteristics.

The main advantage of open-ended questions is their flexibility and the low degree of external intervention. Since the students were allowed to "provide information along the lines that they themselves determine" (Cohen, 1983:6), they produced a large number of specific learning techniques and habits, and provided interesting personal insights about the language learning process and strategies.

One of the problems of using open-ended questions is in statistical evaluation. The specific techniques provided by each learner vary in terms of number and the ways they were described, and therefore could not be used for statistical analysis.

Another problem to be considered is that this flexible questioning format demanded thinking, recollection, and insights on the part of the respondents. It is challenging and more time consuming than the highly structured format. Some students may try to avoid the trouble by just giving a simple or vague answer, due to their impatience or lack of enthusiasm. It is also possible that some students were not conscious or insightful about their own learning processes, and were therefore incapable of analyzing their learning experiences.

Although there reservations must be borne in mind, strategies questionnaires are still considered to be a useful and productive research instrument in that they indicate individual learning styles as well as common learning experiences and characteristics.

5.5.2 Interview

The main purpose of the interviews was to obtain more detailed information about learning strategies and the learners' insights, which could complement the questionnaire findigs. In fact, they proved to be a valid and important research instrument. They provided supporting evidence for the strategies and techniques identified through the questionnaires, and yielded additional strategies and techniques which were not specifically indicated from the questionnaire findings. Furthermore, they provided interesting ideas and insights about the language learning process, and a number of learner characteristics which are hypothesized to be related to language learning, particularly to the use of strategies and techniques.

The interviewees were guided and encouraged to describe and elaborate on their language learning experiences in an informal way, without feeling restricted by any specific questions. Such a semi-directed interviewing format revealed valuable and detailed information about idiosyncratic learning styles, personal insights about the language learning process, which could not be obtained through the use of a formally structured questionnaire.

Since the interviews focused on a limited number of issues, the duration of time did not seem to be a problem. It is felt that with a carefully prepared interview schedule, one hour of interviewing could yield a lot of valuable information without causing impatience or fatigue on the part of the interviewee. In fact, most of the students were interested in such discussions, and were willing to share their learning experiences. However, the conversations

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sometimes digressed, mainly due to the lack of experience in conducting interviews on the part of the interviewer.

Like the open-ended questions, the interviews created difficulty in statistical evaluation. Yet this problem does not invalidate the interview findings, since they provided in-depth information which is equally important for the study of language learning process and strategies.

Another aspect to be borne in mind is the relative small number of interviewees involved and the exclusion of the average students. If the sample had been larger and had included some average students, more information about idiosyncratic learning style as well as affective factors might have been obtained.

The strategies questionnaires and interviews as elicitation instruments can make important contributions to our understanding of the language learning process. However, they both have a common problem, as pointed out by Cohen: they focused only on the "subset of learning strategies that the learner is conscious of", and therefore could only tap information about "the conscious mental processes involved in language learning" (1983:2).

Another common problem is "the recency of the event" (Cohen, 1983:6). Some of the learning activities examined in the questionnaire or in the interviews may have taken place long before the investigation, and certain insights may have been lost due to the long time gap between the learning experience and the study.

Notes

1. For discussion of the influence of the Chinese traditional ideas about education on modern EFL teaching in China, see Yu Zhen-zhong, 1983.

2. "Intensive reading" is a special term used in FL teaching in Chinese universities and colleges. It refers to the basic foreign language course for language major students. It focuses on correct procunciation and intonation, mastery of grammar and the basic vocabulary, and the development of the skills in reading, listening, speaking and writing. An intensive reading lesson usually consists of the follwing steps: presentation of a new text, explanation of the new vocabulary items and grammatical structures followed by oral practice and written exercises.

For more detailed explanation and discussion of the "intensive reading" course, see W. Allen and N. Spada, 1982; and Liu Hua Chen, 1983.

3. This idea was suggested by Dr. Cohen, personal communication, 1984.

4. This format is adapted from that used in the discussion of the interview findings in Naiman et al, 1978.

Chapter 6

Case Studies of Selected Students

In order to have a clearer picture of EFL learning process and strategies for developing oral communicative proficiency employed by Chinese students in formal learning settings, four case studies will be presented, using the information obtained from the interviews and the strategies questionnaires. Of the four students selected for these case studies, two were among the three highest achievers, and the other two were among the four lowest achievers in oral proficiency as defined by the oral test. They represent different types of successful and unsuccessful learners and illustrated unique learning approaches. They also demonstrate that learning strategies and techniques are highly individual, and that there is no a stereotyped "the good language learner" or "the poor language learner."

6.1. Case Study One

Name: Student A
Sex: M
Age: 21

Student A scored the highest in the oral test in the whole sample. In fact, he was commonly recognized by other students as the very best in overall English proficiency in Grade 4.

Student A was born and brought up in a small city in Guangdong Province. Before entering the colloge, he had had two years of experience of learning English in his secondary school where he

learned some of the basic grammar of English and developed a small vocabulary.

In the first few months of EFL learning at college, he became fascinated with learning to speak and understand the foreign language. He practised very hard in class. After class, he listened to stories on tape, imitated the pronunication and then tried to re-tell the stories in his own words. He also read quite a number of course materials on spoken English, and memorized a lot of situational dialogues. He used to write down in his notebook the colloquial and useful expressions which he came across in his reading, and then memorize them. He even recited texts or situational dialogues when taking a shower, which amazed his fellow students a lot.

The other frequently used techniques for improving his oral skills at early stages include listening to and doing pattern drills, reading aloud, listening to radio programs for comprehension, and being "very active" in group oral activities.

Such practice and memorization were "very effective" and greatly helped improve his oral skills in the first year. His success greatly increased his self-confidence as well as personal interest in oral skills.

In addition to speaking and listening, Student A was also interested in reading and writing, and did "satisfactorily well" in them. When asked about the relationship of practice and achievement in the oral and written modalities, he commented:

> Improving your aural abilities means much more than just listening with your ears. That won't get your very far. First of all, you must enlarge your vocabulary. Next you've got to widen you knowledge of the world. For example, if you want to

understand the B.B.C. international news, you must first familiarize yourself with the words and phrases commonly used in those topics. You can find them in the News Bulletin or China Daily (a newspaper in English). When you have found out what happened last week from your reading and learned a certain number of words and phrases related to those topics, you can figure out at least the general ideas of the news broadcast when you are listening.

Student A regarded himself as being "very talkative" and "enthusiastic." He liked talking with teachers and other students in English. He believed that one could not make much progress in oral English if one did not practise speaking a lot. When asked about his tricks in learning to speak, he replied:"I have only three tricks: practise, memorize, and never be afraid of losing face."

Even at early stages, he often looked for chances to speak with native speakers. Later he succeeded in establishing close personal contact with some of the native-speaker teachers. He often went to Chinese films with them on campus and tried to interpret as much as possible for them. After the film, he used to discuss it with the native speakers. Such activities not only helped to improve his oral abilities, but also greatly widened his knowledge about Western cultures.

Student A considered conscious learning as being "extremely important" in language learning. He recalled that in his second year of study at college, he studied morphology and etymology, which facilitated his learning of vocabulary systematically. He was also very conscious of the choice of words, ways of expressing and organizing ideas in reading and writing.

He was also a highly independent student, and liked to have his own short-term and long-term plans of studies, with focus on certain aspects of language learning at each learning stage. He described his personal plans for EFL learning during his 3 and a half years of college life as follows:

1st year: Focused on oral skill, read and recited situational dialogues, read simplified stories, learned useful words and expressions.

2nd year: Read more simplified stories and novels, studied grammar systematically, continued to improve oral skills, listened to radio programs and read newspapers and news bulletins.

3rd year: Read more novels (mostly the originals), newspapers and magazines for comprehension and knowledge.

4th year: Read a lot of novels, and magazines with emphasis on international politics, prepared for examinations for the U.N. interpreters training course.

Student A had an "excellent memory" for language learning. He regarded memorization as being one of the very important and effective ways to learn a language, particularly at early stages. He studied several course books on spoken English, such as the Linguaphone , and memorized most of the dialogues in them. As a result, he learned a large number of expressions and set phrases used in different situations, and "always had ready words when conversing with others." He developed his own techniques to help with memorization: cyclical memorization and making assciations. However, he stressed that memorization should be done in a meaningful way, and must be complemented by extensive reading and listening.

Commenting on the reasons for his success in EFL learning, Student A mainly attribtuted it to his strong motivation to learn and his flexible and effective learning strategies. He had the ambition of being a simultaneous interpreter in the U.N., and was going to take the examinations for the U.N. interpreters training course in Beijing in the near future.

He worked "very hard" during the 3 and a half years of college life. Because of his "appropriate learning techniques" and "high working efficiency," he always had enough time for sports, which helped

to "keep a strong body and a clear head for more efficient and effective work." He concluded

> Working for a longer time doesn't necessarily mean gaining more. The key point is efficiency. When I work, I work very hard. When it's time for sports, I play hard , too." (laughter)

6.2. Case Study Two

Name: Student B
Sex: M
Age: 22

Student B was the third highest scorer in the oral test. He was also commonly recognized as one of the best in overall English proficiency in Grade 4, especially in reading and writing.

He was born in a small city in Northen China. He developed personal interest in learning English in his secondary school, in which he systematically studied English grammar and had some training in reading and listening. The three years of learning experience at home helped him lay a fairly good foundation for further achievement at college.

He had more interest in reading and writing, partly due to his interest in Chinese literature and composition. He had developed the habit of keeping a diary early in secondary school, and began to keep a diary in English at college.

Student B regarded reading and writing as being "important and fundamental" for the improvement of the overall language proficiency, including the oral abilities.

> Oral practice can help you improve fluency and accuracy, but that's not enough. You've got to read a lot, and then try to write. ... I've spent much more time in reading and writing than speaking and listening, especially at the intermediate and advanced stage.

Uplike many other students, Student B did not have much drilling, reading aloud, or story-retelling at the early learning stages. He considered such formal practice "not very useful". In stead, he read a lot and often listened to radio or tape recordings for improving comprehension as well as learning new vocabulary and grammatical items. Sometimes he would like to translate short stories or articles from English to Chinese, and then back again into English.

During classes, he often volunteered to answer questions, and consciously monitored other people's speech and corrected their errors mentally to himself. Although he did not talk in English as often as some other students after class, he was an active participant in class and group oral activities. He liked discussion most, because he could prepare for it and then practise purposefully and systematically.

> To practise your oral English doesn't necessarily mean you should be a chatter-box all day. You need a topic and then prepare for it. Such purposeful practice would be far more effective than just chatting.

Student B was also a highly independent student. He preferred to be left alone and learn the language mainly in his own way. He made a conscious distinction between his formal reading practice and functional reading practice. For most of the time, he would read very quickly for comprehension, as he described:

> When I read novels, I find there is communication between the author and me. I feel like I'm talking and listening to him, and become completely and deeply involved in the situation and the story.

Sometimes he would select a short article or a few paragraphs for "intensive study," namely the study and anlysis of language forms, the way of organizing ideas and the style of writing. He had the habit of noting down the "beautiful and useful expressions" he found in reading, and later would try to use them in his speech or writing.

He felt that his memory for language learning was "not as good as before." He seldom did rote memory, but rather read, listened and wrote a lot in order to let the language "naturally sink in."

He also had some little tricks to help with memorization. For example, he often carried a pocket dictionary with him, and underlined the words which he had looked up. He would then go over them in his spare time and try to imagine situations in which he could use them.

When asked about the main reasons for his achievement, he felt that it was mainly due to his constant and conscious practice in reading and writing. A strong mostivation may also be another factor, for once he was told that the best students may have the opportunity to be sent abroad for further studies.

6.3. Case Study Three

Name: Student C
Sex: M
Age: 21

Student C was the fourth lowest scorer in the oral test. He was born and brought up in a big city in Northen China. He learned Russian as a foreign language for about one year in his junior middle school. Then his family moved to a small city in Guangdong

Province. After graduation, he sat for the national higher education entrance examinations for science students, but failed. The next year, he decided to try the examinations for arts students, hoping that they would be "relatively easier." He gave up his Russian , and started to learn English from scratch. He went to an intensive EFL training course for 8 months, and "worked like the devil." He recited texts, memorized new vocabulary items, studied grammar books, and listened to tape recordings. With these months of tremendous efforts, he succeeded in passing the national examinations for arts students, and became an English major.

Although Student C had talent for language learning (e.g. a good memory, sharp ears and quick response), he was much less interested in language learning than in science and technology. He explained:"I turned to English merely because it was probably an easier way for me to get into college."

When learning English at college, he was relatively more interested in listening and reading. Learning to speak as "O.K.", but he really hated writing.

He felt that he had "a mixture of extroversion and introversion" in personality: outgoing and talkative with friends but silent among strangers or people "sharing no common interest." For most of the time, he preferred to read alone with music (disco) playing loudly "to help concentrate." He seldom practised oral English with other students, but enjoyed talking with native speakers and had close personal contact with some of the native-speaker teachers living on campus. Commenting on his abilities to communicate with them, he felt he was good at listening comprehension, and had little difficulty in "getting the message across." He did not monitor his

own speech very much, and only corrected his errors when he felt he had been misunderstood.

He did not pay much attention to the "mechanical" practice, such as drilling, reading aloud and reciting, story-retelling at early stages, for they were "dull and boring." Yet he was fond of listening to tape recordings and repeating after them. When listening to native speakers, he would often repeat the words sub-vocally.

Another technique for improving oral abilities was talking to himself and recording it on tape. Then he would replay the tape and listen to his own speech critically. However, he was "not very active" in class, and "rarely" attended group oral activities after class.

When asked about his opinions on learning style, Student C replied that his learning process was mainly an unconscious one. He hated grammar, and believed that extensive exposure to the language was the best way to build up "the sense of the language." He was interested in literature (both Chinese and English), particularly science fictions and contemporary novels. He put a chart on the wall, and enjoyed the pleasure of adding new book titles (those he hah finished reading). When reading, he mainly concentrated on the content, and seldom used the dictionary. He often listened to radio programs or tape recordings, and liked watching films or TV programs in English most.

Studend C said that he had spent much more time reading books in Chinese than in English at college. Besides science fictions and detective stories, he also read books on literature critique, international politics and history, biographies of famous people and

radio engineering, mostly in Chinese. His hobbies covered a wide area, ranging from photography to painting and sculpture. He explained that

> I'm not a forceful person. I do things only out of personal interest. Maybe I could have done better in my English if I had had more interest in it.

Much less efforts were made in memorization at college than when preparing for the entrance examinations. He seldom forced himself to do rote memory, but developed some "very effective" techniques to help memorize. He demonstrated his trick of making associations in this way:

> If I want to keep in mind the names of the objects on the desk (pointing to a few stationery items), I say to my self 'You can cut the paper into pieces with the pair of scissors , and then stick them together using the glue .' Once you've linked them together in a meaningful way, you can remember them far more easily.

However, Student C did not make much effort to enlarge his English vocabulary, and noticed now that his small vocabulary sometimes hindered communication. He was also aware that his overall English proficiency was not as good as some other students'. Yet he was proud of his wide knowledge of the world, which he believed as "equally important" for future work.

6.4. Case Study Four

Name: Student D
Sex: Female
Age: 21

Student D was the second lowest scorer in the oral test. She was born in a big city in Southern China, and had 6 years of experience of learning EFL before entering college.

She was regarded as a very good student by teachers at school, enthusiastic, hard-working and well-disciplined. She became monitor of her class early in her primary school, and had self-confidence in her work and studies. Her favourite subjects at school were math and Chinese. She was also interested in English.

After graduating from secondary school, she took the national higher education entrance examinations for science students, but failed. The next year, she shifted her focus to the arts subjects. This time she was successful, and became a college student of English.

In her first year at college, she was interested in learning to understand and speak English. Her most frequently used techniques for improving her oral skills were those characteristic of formal practice: reading aloud, listening, repeating, drilling, and story-retelling. She regarded such practice as being essential for "laying a solid foundation." She used to spend a lot of time on texts, consulting the dictionary for anything new or confusing, analyzing sentence structures, doing grammatical exercises and pattern drills, and making sentences using the newly learned vocabulary or grammatical items. Sometimes she would try to speak with native speakers. When she spoke in English, she "never" paid much attention to the language forms she used, but was just interested in getting the message across.

In spite of her great efforts in English learning, she progressed slowly in the early and intermediate stages, and gradually fell behind the others in both oral and written abilities.

Having been a fairly successful student all through her earlier schooling, she had difficulty accepting the fact that she had become

one of the bottom students in English. She felt very upset at her setbacks and lost most of her self-confidence.

> When I have to speak in the class, I always grow extremely nervous, and keep making mistakes. I often blame myself for being so stupid. In fact I usually do better when I practise by myself."

As a result of a lack of self-confidence, she became less active in class or group oral activities, and lost her interest and courage to speak with other students or native speakers. When preparing for an oral report in class or group, she usually wrote it down and then memorized it, for fear of making mistakes. She spent more time in reading and doing exercises, but found herself reading slowly and did not comprehend well. When coming across unknown words in her reading, she often looked them up in the dictionary for their meaning.

She felt her memory was "quite poor." She had difficulty in remembering what the teacher had explained in the class, and often felt embarrassed when failing to answer the teachers's questions on previously explained language points, or failing to recite the texts. She complained that her "poor memory" had greatly affected her English learning, particularly in learning vocabulary.

> I'm very frustrated when I have to write, for my English vocabulary is small, and I can't remember the collocations, prepositions and the set phrases I've learned before. I always get stuck because I don't have the right words. So I have to think in Chinese, then look up in a dictionary for the English words.

In spite of her failure in English learning, she did well in other subjects including Chinese literature, world history and geography, political economy and philosophy. She was a student

leader in Grade 4, and had fairly high organizational abilities. Yet all her abilities to analyze, comprehend, and to solve problems seemed to fail her in English learning. She felt very irritated at her inability to learn English well, and was at a loss.

Student D was aware that "there might be something wrong with my ways of studying," but could not figure out why and how. She once asked the successful students for their "tricks", but was very disappointed to find that those tricks were not really useful to her.

> I've tried my utmost, and don't know what to do next. May be it was a wrong decision for me to major in English. Perhaps I was not born for learning English.

6.5. Discussion of Case Studies

The preceeding 4 case studies demonstrate individuality as well as similarities in EFL learning in a formal learning setting. The learning experiences reported by the 2 successful students substantiate the strategies discussed in the previous chapter (see 5.4). Although Student A and B differ in their personal interest and specific learning techniques in approaching their learning tasks, they seem to share the following characteristics: 1)consciously increasing exposure to the language in meaningful situations, 2) active, purposeful, and independent in learning, and 3) highly motivated and hard-working. Their experiences illustrate that good language learners take advantages of potentially useful learning situations, and if necessary create them (Strategy 1). They are conscious of their own characteristics and develop specific techniques which are effective and appropriate to their own characteristics and needs (Strategy 2). They develop an awareness of

language as a system and a means of communication and interaction, and consciously involve themselves in integrative and meaningful practices (Strategies 3 and 4).

The other two case studies, on the other hand, indicate that unsuccessful learning can be attributed to various factors. The learning experiences described by the two unsuccessful students illustrate that affective factors, especially motivation and personal interest, affect the development and use of specific strategies and techniques.

They both reported a lower personal interest in EFL learning than Students A and B, and had the same experience of failing the science examinations which had been their primary interest area.

The learning experiences reported by Student D suggest that success can not be attributed so much to merely "hard-working" as to appropriate and effective learning strategies and techniques. They also indicate that success/failure in language learning affects and is affected by self-confidence.

Considering the four case studies, it is felt that discussions with successful and problem students are significant from both a theoretical and practical point of view. They provide useful information for research study of language learning process. By the same token, they can serve as valuable experiences for both the teacher and student in sharing their opinions about language learning and ideas for change or improvement.

Chapter 7

Conclusions

The major findings of the present study will first be summarized and then followed by suggestions for further research and then some practical implications for classroom teachers.

7.1. Major findings

The major findings can be divided into two categories: 1) those related to strategies and learner factors, and 2) those related to research methodology.

7.1.1. Findings Regarding Strategies and Learner Factors

7.1.1.1. Those Confirming Findings in Other Studies in the Field

1) This study confirmed several strategies which the Rubin-Stern-Naiman inventories had suggested. It demonstrated that certain learning strategies are essential to success in language learning. It also indentified a large number of techniques which are characteristic of successful learning by Chinese EFL students in the oral modality, particularly in oral communication (see 5.1.1, 5.3.1 and 5.4).

2) Both the questionnaire and interview findings substantiated the crucial role of functional practice (practising and using the language in communicative situations) in language learning, as suggested in Bialystok's studies (1978, 1979) (see 5.2.1).

3) The study demonstrated the complexity and individuality of foreign language learning process under formal learning conditions.

This finding is consistent with that in Naiman et al.'s study (1978:99) (see 5.1 and 5.3).

4) The questionnaire findings and the case studies illustrated the characteristics of successful language learners, as postulated by Wesche (1979) and Reiss (1981): insightfulness about their learning processes and strategies, and purposefulness and activeness in learning (see 5.1.2 abd 6).

5) The study provided supporting evidence to the postulation of the important role of motivational factors in language learning, as suggested by many other studies in this field (see 5.3.2).

6) According to the results of the interviews, the learning processes of the uccessful students appeared to be highly conscious and systematic, or comprised of both conscious and unconscious elements (see 4.5.3). Such finding is identical to that in Naiman et al.'s study (1978).

7.1.1.2 New Findings

1) While the study confirmed the crucial role of functional practice strategy, it also identified three specific techniques characteristic of this strategy as being important in improving oral communicative abilities: a) thinking in English, b) speaking with other students, teachers and native speakers), and c) being active in group oral communicative activities (see 4.4.3 and 5.2.1).

2) Practice in reading was found to be related to performance on the oral task. This indicates that a lot of practice in reading facilitates the improvement of oral proficiency (see 4.4.3 and 5.2.2).

3) The interview findings suggested that a high level of independence in language learning, especially at intermediate and advanced stages, characterizes successful learning (see 4.5.5).

4) In addition to the confirmation of the important role of motivational factors in language learning in general, this study also demonstrated that motivational factors affect the development and use of learning strategies and techniques (see 5.3.2).

5) On the whole, the present study confirmed the original hypothesis that Chinese FL students in many respects are similar to the Western FL/SL students as described in many studies (e.g. Rubin 1975; Stern 1975; Naiman et al. 1978; Reiss 1981, Wesche 1979; Bialystok 1978, 1979; etc.) even though they are different in cultural and educational backgound. On the other hand, it appears that Chinese students may put more emphasis on certain techniques such as memorization, making vocabulary lists, and listening to radio programs (see 5.1.3).

7.1.2. Findings Regarding Research Methodology

1) Quantitative assessment of strategies and learner factors through questionnaire was productive to a certain extent. It also enables easy compilation and statistical analyses. However, it is felt that many aspects of the language learning process are missed by such an approach due to its highly structured format.

2) Open-ended questions on the basis of hypothetical learning situations were found to be productive, particularly in revealing individual aspects of the learning processes.

3) This study demonstrated that consulting students directly in a carefully constructed interview could make an important contribution

to our understandng of the language learning process. Such a research instrument is able to obtain detailed information on learning strategies and techniques, and various learner factores. It can also reveal a certain number of idiosyncratic patterns in language learning, as well as learners' perceptions of the interrelationship of language learning achievement, strategies, learning styles and affective factor.

7.2. Suggestions for Further Research

1) The findings concerning the relationship between oral proficiency and the strategies and techniques under investigation are considered tentative, because of the small sample due to the limited amount of time and the number of native speaker examiners that were available. Provided that sufficient time and ideal conditions are available, a much larger sample is needed in order to obtain more definitive explanations of the effects of the varialbes which are believed to be beneficial to language learning achievement.

2) Although cross-sectional correlational studies as the present one can indicate certain trends in the relationship between success in language learning and strategies and other learner factors, one can not relate these factors dircectly to language learning process, as pointed out by Naiman and his colleagues (1978: 68). It is therefore suggested that longitudinal studies be conducted.

3) Learning techniques may vary at different learning stages. In further studies, such variables could be controlled by including groups of students at different learning stages.

4) The multiplicity of sources of self-report data on learning strategies and techniques proved quite productive. It is felt, however, that self-observation or think-aloud data may provide additional information on strategies and techniques for improving oral abilities.

5) The combination of language learning aptitude tests with strategy studies may help to investigate the interrelationships of learning achievement, aptitude, strategies and other learner factors.

6) It may be useful and significant to interview the teachers on their perceptions of their students learning behaviors and processes.

7) The present study suggested that motivational factors affect the development and use of strategies and techniques. Further studies can be conducted to investigate their relationship with more depth.

8) As described previously (see 5.3.3), memorization seemed to be a necessary or effective technique to the Chinese students according to their reported learning experiences, yet its effects were not indicated by statistical analyses. It is therefore suggested that further studies be conducted to examine the specific techniques of this variable systematically, and its relationship with the Chinese traditional concepts of education (as well as with other cultures with strong traditions of memorization).

9) The findings of the present study are thought to be tentative, also because of the uncertainty of the reliability and validity of the oral test as the criterion measure. For further studies, it would be desirable to use standardized tests if feasible and appropriate. An alternative way to control the validity factor would

be, to correlate the researcher-devised tests with standardized tests.

7.3. Some Practical Implications

Although the present study was originally designed to examine the language learning process and strategies from a theoretical point of view, certain interesting implications may be drawn from the findings for the classroom teachers.

7.3.1. Understanding More About the Learners

This study demonstrated that foreign language learning is highly complex and individual. There are many ways to learn a language successfully. By the same token, failure in language learning can be caused by many different factors. Understanding and analyzing the various factors affecting the learning process can help the teacher develop more effective and appropriate teaching methods and learning activities to assist the good learners in optimizing their learning, and to help the problem learners to overcome their difficulties.

However it was found in this study, particularly in the interviews, that there was a lack of or insufficient mutual understanding between some students and their teachers.

In such cases, studies of the language learning process, learning strategies, and other learner factors can play an important role in assisstting language teachers in their understanding of the importance of various factors involved in the learning process, and developing sensitivity to them.

Although our understanding of the nature of language learning process is still far from being complete, the literature in this

field can help classroom teachers to widen their knowledge of the language learning process, the important variables and their relationships to learning outcomes. Such knowledge will enable them to look for and analyze factors affecting language teaching and learning, and to develop a profile of the characteristics of individual students.

7.3.2. How Can the Teacher Help the Learners?

In conjunction with other studies in this field (e.g. Rubin 1975; Stern 1975, 1983; Naiman et al. 1978; Bialystok 1978, 1979; Wesche 1979; Reiss 1981; etc.), it was confirmed in this study that certain learning strategies and learner characteristics are crucial for success in language learning.

It was felt in this study that learner strategies and techniques are closely related with learning conditions, cognitive and affective factors, the learner's age, the past learning experiences, cultural background, and the learner's SL/FL proficiency level. They are part of the learner's overall development as an individual, and slavish imitation could not bring much change. There was evidence that although certain unsuccessful students were aware of their problems and attempted to adopt the specific learning techniques described by their successful peers, they found that those techniques were not very helpful in their cases (see 6.4).

However this does not mean that we can do nothing to help the less successful students. On the contrary, it suggests that more efforts should be made to provide supporting conditions for the less successful students, and to encourage them to explore consciously and freely in order to find or establish their own particular

learning style which could take best advantage of their personality characteristics.

Such efforts may probably bring significant changes on the part of the average students, particularly those who may have potential abilities but lack effective and appropriate strategies and techniques, or need guidance and courage to explore and succeed. As for the poor students, perhaps much greater efforts are needed by the teacher to help them make the most of their abilites according to their cogntive learning style and personality characteristics.

How then can teachers help their learners to optimize or improve their language proficiency by adopting some of the successful methods identified by recent researches? The following suggestions may be noteworthy.

First, teachers can help their students develop an awareness of their own charscteristics, and aid them in developing or adjusting strategies and techniques according to their specific conditions and characteristics. The interviews with the 19 subjects indicated that brief talks or discussions with students on ways of language learning and teaching, and on ideas for change may be desirable and profitable for both the teacher and the students.

Secondly, methods for creating situations in which students can learn and use the target language purposefully and meaningfully should be encouraged. Students should also be encouraged and guided to explore outside the classroom and increase their exposure to the language in communicative situations by actively participating in various communicative activities and social interactions.

Thirdly, teachers can devise learning activities which can arouse and foster learners' interest in language learning. They can

alsp help the slow or problem students to increase their self-confidence by providing opportunities for them to explore and succeed, even if these successes are limited. This may be partcularly important at early learning stages.

Fourthly, teachers can help inhibited students by creating a kind of learning atmosphere in which the students feel at ease and comfortable. Interesting learning activities such as language games and meaningful interactions can be devised to get the students involved. Teachers can also ask the successful students to describe to the less successful students their own learning experiences, particularly how they cope with the affective demands made upon them by language learning, as suggested by Reiss (1981:127). This kind of information may inspire the less successful students to overcome their inhibition and to adopt a more active approach to language learning.

The present study is a tentative attempt both in the investigation of learner strategy and research methodology. It is hoped that such a tentative attempt could serve as a basis for further study in learner strategy for different language learning tasks, at different learning stages, under different language learning conditions, and at different levels of language proficiency.

Appendix I Strategies Questionnaire

No:___

Please answer the following questions honestly and frankly according to YOUR OWN learning experience at college. Do not hesitate to choose the answers that best describe your learning experience, for there are NO simply "right" or "wrong" learning techniques, but rather the way in which you approach the English studies most naturally.

Do not give your name. The personal information you give here will be used for the convenience of an interview that might follow. All the data collected will be used for a research on English learning in China conducted in another institution. Your teachers will not see your answers.

Please complete Part I first. When finished, hand it in to the person who is temporarily in charge of your class before going on to Part II.

Sex: male ____ female ____ Age:____
Years of experience of learning English before entering college:____
You are from (check one)
___ a big city ___ a medium-sized city ___ a small city/town

Part I.

以下问题是关于你在大学的学习方法，请尽量简明扼要，必要的话，请用 a, b, c .....

(The following questions are about your learning techniques used at college. Please be brief and specific. Use a, b, c, ... when necessary.)

1. 在提高英语听力方面，你觉得哪些具体学习方法最有效？

(What strategies or techniques have helped you most in improving your listening comprehension abilities?)

2. 在提高英语口语方面，你觉得哪些具体学习方法最有效？

(What strategies or techniques have helped you most in improving your English speaking abilities?)

(Please hand in this part to the teacher. Then go on to Part II)

Part II

For the following questions, check one answer for each.

1. How often do you read newspapers, magazines, books, brochures or pamphlets primarily in order to learn new words or structures?

___very often ___often ___sometimes ___rarely ___never

2. Do you speak English with other students or teachers after class?

___very often ___often ___sometimes ___rarely ___never

3. How often do you practice reading aloud to improve your pronunciation and intonation?

___very often ___often ___sometimes ___rarely ___never

4. How often do you listen to and do pattern drills after class?

___very often ___often ___sometimes ___rarely ___never

5. How often do you repeat a tape recording while listening to it?

___very often ___often ___sometimes ___rarely ___never

6. How often do you listen to radio or tape recordings primarily to improve your pronunciation and intonation?

___very often ___often ___sometimes ___rarely ___never

7. How often do you look for chances to speak to native speakers?

___very often ___often ___sometimes ___rarely ___never

8. When your teacher asks questions in class, do you try to answer them mentally to your self?

___very often ___often ___sometimes ___rarely ___never

9. How often do you read newspapers, magazines, books, brochures or pamphlets primarily to improve your reading comprehension?

___very often ___often ___sometimes ___rarely ___never

10. Do you find yourself correcting other students' speech mentally to yourself when they make an error?

___very often ___often ___sometimes ___rarely ___never

11. How often do you speak to yourself in English, either silently or aloud?

___very often ___often ___sometimes ___rarely ___never

12. How often do you listen to English radio programs or tape recordings in order to improve your listening comprehension?

___very often ___often ___sometimes ___rarely ___never

13. Do you find yourself repeating words and phrases after your teacher or a native speaker silently to yourselt while listening?

___very often ___often ___sometimes ___rarely ___never

14. How often do you memorize dialogues, stcries or other reading materials from your textbook?

___very often ___often ___sometimes ___rarely ___never

15. How often do you memorize stories, dialogues, or other materials which you read after class?

___very often ___often ___sometimes ___rarely ___never

16. How often do you look for chances to attend lectures or talks given by native speakers (e.g. visiting scholars) which are not part of your course?

___very often ___often ___sometimes ___rarely ___never

17. When listening to your teachers or native speakers, do you pay attention to the ways they express themselves (e.g. idiomatic or colloquial expressions), and try to use them in your own practice?

___very often ___often ___sometimes ___rarely ___never

18. How often do you re-tell stories or texts after class?

___very often ___often ___sometimes ___rarely ___never

19. How often do you look for chances to watch films or TV programs in English?

___very often ___often ___sometimes ___rarely ___never

20. How often do you think in English while working/studying in English?

___very often ___often ___sometimes ___rarely ___never

21. How do you view your participation in pair work and group oral activities as compared with the rest of the class?

___very active ___active ___moderately active ___not very active ___not at all active

22. In informal conversations, which of the following techniques do you use most often?

___ always pay a lot of attention to the forms (choice of words, expressions, grammar, pronunciation, etc.) you use, correct yourself whenever you make an error

___ often pay attention to the forms you use, correcting only the "big" errors and ignoring the "slips of the tongue"

___ pay certain attention to the forms you use, do not correct errors unless they have already caused misunderstanding

___ never pay any attention to the forms you use, only interested in getting the message across

Part III

For the following questions, check any answers that apply.

1. When preparing for an oral report in class or group, which of the following techniques do you find yourself using most often?

___ organize it in Chinese, then put it into English

___ write it down in English, then memorize it

___ organize it in English orally, when practise it several times

___ write down an outline in English, then practise it

___ just think of an outline in English, and elaborate it in class

___ other (please specify) _____

2. When learning new words, which of the following techniques do you generally use?

___ (1) make up vocabulary lists with explanation in Chinese

___ (2) make up vocabulary lists with explanation in English

___ (3) write the words down many times to help memorize them

___ (4) use the words to make sentences

___ (5) do substitution drills

___ (6) repeat the words orally to help memorize them

___ (7) look them up in the dictionary for their collocation

___ (8) use them as much as possible in speech and writing

___ (9) take dictation of the new words from teacher or fellow students

___(10) associate them to other words that have the same stem

___(11) associate them to other words that have similar sound or spelling, etc.

___(12) other (please specify) _____

3. In learning new grammatical structures (e.g. tenses, voice, sentence patterns), which of the following techniques do you use?

___ (1) repeat them orally to help memorize them

___ (2) write them down to help memorize them

___ (3) make sentences using them

___ (4) study grammar books

___ (5) look them up in the dictionary for examples

___ (6) use them in speech or writing as much as possible

___ (7) do pattern drills

___ (8) other (please specify) _____

Thank you very much for your patience and cooperation.

Appendix II Interview Schedule

I. Personal interest or preference for modality in language learning

Ques. 1: Which of the following are you most interested in or do you prefer in your EFL learning?

a) Oral: learning to understand and speak

b) Written: learning to read and write

Can you tell me the reasons?

Ques. 2. While learning English at college, you have had the most success in _____ as compared with your own starting point.

a) speaking

b) understanding the spoken language

c) reading

d) writing

Could you rank your achievement in these four aspects according to your degree of success?

II. Motivation

Ques. 3. Considering your level in EFL, would you say it was because of your strong/the lack of motivation to learn the foreign language?

III. Learning Style

Ques. 4. Some people say that you cannot make a conscious effort in learning a foreign language. They hate to study grammar; they say you must simply allow the language to sink in gradually.

Others argue that language learning is a conscious and systematic process. You set about it by studying, practising, by constantly asking for explanations and rules. In short, by actively thinking about it.

Which of the ideas would more represent your point of view?

Conscious: Unconscious:

Ques. 5. Could you tell me your own experiences about it?

IV. Memorization

Ques. 6. What do you think of your ability to use your memory in English learning as compared with the rest of your class?

Ques. 7. What do you think of the role of memorization in FL learning? Please specify, using your own experiences as examples.

Ques. 8. Have you developed some specific techniques to help with memorization in your EFL learning? If yes, what are they?

V. Dependence/Independence in EFL Learning

Ques. 9. At the early stage of EFL learning at college, did you prefer to be

a) always firmly guided by the teacher or the courses
b) mainly guided by the teacher or the courses
c) partly guided by the teacher and partly left to your own devices and learn the language in your own way
d) mainly left to your own devices and learn the language in your own way
e) completely left to your own devices and learn the language in your own way

What about at the intermediate stages?

And at the advanced stages?

VI. The Role of Learning Strategies and Techniques

Ques. 10. Considering your level in EFL, would you attribute it to the specific learning techniques which you developed? What do you think of the role of learning strategies and techniques in EFL learning?

Appendix III Tables

Table 15 Simple Regression: Effects of Each Individual Variable on the Oral Test

Variable	Simple R	R Square	F-value
Formal Practice	0.15	0.02	1.37
Functional Practice	0.33**	0.11	6.67*
Monitoring	-0.03	0.001	0.04
Memorization	-0.02	0.0003	0.017
Re-telling	0.15	0.02	1.29
Drill Imitating	F-value or tolerance-level is insufficient for computation.		
Speaking with Other Students Teachers, & Native Speakers	0.48***	0.23	16.54***
Thinking in English	0.49***	0.24	17.88***
Activeness in Group Oral Communicative Activities	0.46***	0.21	15.16***
Attending After-class Oral Communicative Activities	0.09	0.01	0.45
Listening	0.06	0.003	0.18
Speaking	0.33**	0.11	6.66*
Reading	0.43***	0.19	12.93**

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Table 16. Intercorrelations of All Variables Examined in Questionnaire Part II

	Formal Practice	Functional Practice	Monitoring	Memorization	Drilling	Imitating	Retelling
Formal Practice	1.00						
Functional Practice	0.62***	1.00					
Monitoring	0.16	0.29**	1.00				
Memorization	0.58***	0.35**	0.24**	1.00			
Drilling	0.66***	0.45***	-0.0006	0.35**	1.00		
Imitating	0.58***	0.19	-0.18	0.02	0.29	1.00	
Retelling	0.65***	0.47***	0.05	0.29**	0.36**	0.28*	1.00
Speaking with Ss,Ts & NSs	0.44***	0.64***	-0.02	0.12	0.30**	0.17	0.27*
Thinking in English	0.45***	0.51***	0.21*	0.25*	0.27*	0.18	0.39***
Activeness in GOC Activities	0.56***	0.61***	0.16	0.24*	0.36**	0.26*	0.47***
Attending Ls, Watching TV & F	0.41***	0.54***	0.28*	0.29*	0.37**	0.01	0.21
Listening	0.53***	0.48***	-0.01	0.06	0.40***	0.36**	0.38**
Speaking	0.86***	0.72***	0.05	0.31**	0.65***	0.55***	0.69***
Reading	0.56***	0.34**	0.09	0.24*	0.25*	0.24*	0.30**

To be continued.

	Speaking with Ss, Ts & NSs	Thinking in English	Activeness in GOC Activities	Attending Ls, Watching TV & F	Listening	Speaking	Reading
Speaking with Ss,Ts & NSs	1.00						
Thinking in English	0.34**	1.00					
Activeness in GOC Activities	0.51***	0.54***	1.00				
Attending Ls, Watching TV & F	0.17	0.32**	0.36**	1.00			
Listening	0.34**	0.31**	0.40***	0.39***	1.00		
Speaking	0.70***	0.49***	0.66***	0.34**	0.20	1.00	
Reading	0.31**	0.33**	0.44***	0.26*	0.20	0.47***	1.00

* p< .05 ** p< .01 *** p< .001 Cases: 58

Speaking with Ss, Ts & NSs = Speaking with Other Students, Teachers and Native Speakers

Activeness in GOC Activities = Activeness in Group Oral Communicative Activities

Attending Ls, Watching TV & F = Attending Lectures, Watching TV and Films

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